

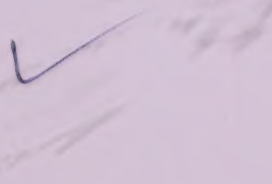
Green and Saffron

Hindu Nationalism and Indian
Environmental Politics

MUKUL SHARMA

Anna Hazare's
movement in
Ralegan Siddhi:
the first serious
account





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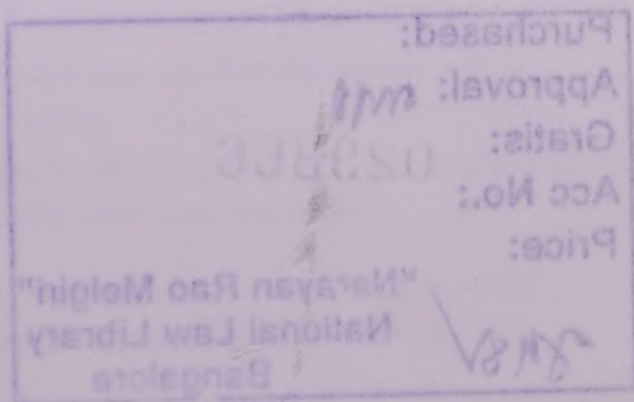
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Green and Saffron

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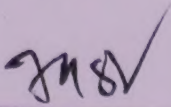
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for
Charu and Ishaan

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Series Editors' Preface

Since the birth of the Chipko Andolan in the Garhwal Himalaya in 1973, India's many regions have experienced an array of environmental movements. These campaigns have been led and energised by peasants, tribals, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and middle-class professionals. They have variously focused on water, air, forests, energy, and wildlife. Some have been Gandhi-style satyagrahas against projects and policies that destroy nature and rural livelihoods. Others have followed an alternative, and equally Gandhian, tradition of constructive work, seeking to restore or revegetate ravaged landscapes.

The Indian environmental movement was born in the 1970s; environmental scholarship in India started in the 1980s. Inspired and intrigued by these movements, historians and social scientists have since produced books and articles examining their social bases, ideologies, strategies of protest, and styles of leadership.

In its depth and range, the scholarship on Indian environmentalism is impressive. But, as Mukul Sharma shows in this strikingly original book, it has suffered from two conceptual blindspots. Environmental scholars, both *desi* and *videshi*, have ignored those crucial realms of social life in India—party politics and religion.

It is worth speculating on these silences. The first may be related to the self-definition of environmentalists themselves. Some Greens like to say they 'are neither Left nor Right—but in front.' In India, at any rate, they have stayed clear of the formal, constitutional, democratic process, neither seeking to fight elections nor to influence the outcome of elections. Environmentalists have seen themselves as above the messy, contaminated, and corrupt world of party politics.

Unfortunately, many scholars have accepted this self-presentation of environmentalism as beyond party politics. Therefore, they have failed to analyse the links, rarely explicit and sometimes unconscious, between movements of environmental protest and particular political parties. At the same time, their own secular and 'scientific' orientation has inhibited most scholars from examining the religious presuppositions of many programmes of environmental action.

Mukul Sharma's *Green and Saffron* is the first work of scholarship to examine, in any depth or detail, the relations between environmentalism and faith-based traditions on the one hand, and between environmentalism and party politics on the other. It does so with immense subtlety and sensitivity. This book marries the field orientation of the investigative reporter that Sharma once was with the analytical sharpness of the scholar that he has now become.

Mukul Sharma's principal case studies in this book come from the Deccan Plateau, the Indo-Gangetic Plain, and the Uttarakhand Himalaya. He is deeply attentive to regional ecologies, to the specific forms of livelihood in these three very different parts of India. He is sensitive to social diversity, and to how caste, gender, and political authority manifest themselves in these three regions. Finally, he is also attentive to language, to the rhetoric and symbols used by social movements to justify or explain their strategies and goals.

The research underlying these case studies is impressively thorough. Sharma uses books, articles, pamphlets, posters, newspaper reports, even cartoons. Where necessary, he uses material from interviews in the field as well. His formidable command of Hindi is evident from the range of sources he draws upon; few works of environmental history in India have so extensively used materials in a language other than English.

This deep research is then deployed to demonstrate the pervasive influence of Hinduism on three environmental campaigns. Sharma shows how religion shapes and structures social action, how it motivates people to act in certain ways and inhibits other paths of action. There is a noticeable overlap, in the cases investigated here, between green and saffron, between the desire to protect or renew nature and the projection, for political purposes, of a particular religion or

religious ideology. This juxtaposition is sometimes unconscious or unacknowledged (as with the rhetoric of the Chipko leader Sunderlal Bahuguna), at other times tacit or understated (as with the Vrindavan afforestation project or the village renewal scheme of Anna Hazare). But there are also times when the juxtaposition is deliberate and calculated, as when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) enter existing environmental campaigns in order to inject them with their ideology of Hindutva.

From Sharma's account, it is clear that this interpenetration of Hinduism and environmentalism occurs both at the conceptual and programmatic levels. There is an overlap at the level of rhetoric—thus, purity and pollution are key categories in both saffron and green thought. But Hindu ideas and images have also more concretely penetrated environmental campaigns. For example, the Vrindavan project presents (or rather invents) Lord Krishna as a crusader for the environment. Again, when the VHP joined hands with the movement to stop the Tehri dam, it brought with it 'wild imaginings and paranoia' about what the dam would do to the culture and civilization of the Hindus. Its rhetoric, writes Sharma, suggested that 'the Himalaya and Ganga's landscapes are haunted not only by an aggressive China but also by a Muslim Pakistan, a communist Russia, and a conspiring West who make war against Hindu Bharat and its culture.'

In one of the later chapters of the book, Sharma draws a suggestive parallel between Hindutva environmentalism and movements in Europe that have likewise linked conservation to a particular national or religious tradition. He quotes the scholar Anna Bramwell, who was one of the first to document these connections. Bramwell, however, was sceptical of all forms of environmentalism. She saw Greens in general as reactionary and anti-modernist. Sharma, more sensibly, distinguishes between different kinds of environmentalism. Some Greens are chauvinistic and authoritarian. However, other Greens base their arguments on reason and evidence, and promote democracy and pluralism.

This is the second work of environmental scholarship to appear in our series. Rajendra Vora's *The World's First Anti-Dam Movement*

dealt principally with developments in the colonial period, which he compared to environmental struggles of the 1990s. By contrast, Mukul Sharma's *Green and Saffron* deals largely with movements of the present day, whose roots and orientations are traced to a more distant past. Taken singly, and together, these two fine books throw a sharp, illuminating spotlight on some vital, if previously ignored, aspects of 'The Indian Century'.

RAMACHANDRA GUHA

SUNIL KHILNANI

Acknowledgements

Since 1998, when I started thinking of writing on the subject of this book, the work on it has gone through many phases on account of changes in my life: from professional journalism to PhD research and academia, from the world of universities to national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs and INGOs) to social-political activism. The subject lived on within me somehow, and even when it seemed I was losing its threads they found their way back via some coincidence, event, or discussion.

It is not a happy situation to be saddled with prolonged and uncertain research and writing. If I had to name one person who had to go through all this with me, who shared the beginning, end, pain, joy, happiness, and burden, and yet offered support all the time with her academic vigour, comments, and suggestions, it would be Charu Gupta. This book would not have begun or concluded without her. I told her, some time ago, that if this work were ever completed it would be dedicated to her. So, with all my love and gratitude, I now dedicate it to her.

The second-most important person, who has been with me throughout in one way or another, is Mahesh Rangarajan, a friend possessed of a unique combination of energy, talent, intellect, and much more. His detailed handwritten comments on my several drafts, his several emails providing references, his queries, discussions, and concern over my progress, all meant a lot to me. Such is Mahesh, and it is why he is dear to us. It is not enough to thank him: this work is as much his as mine.

As a journalist working for the *Navbharat Times* in Delhi, closely

monitoring environmental issues and movements, I was lucky to gain first-hand evidence of environmental politics and practices on the ground. Though my knowledge of the terrain was fuzzy, it haunted me. Being a committed environmental journalist, I was unclear about how to resolve many of the issues that I saw unfold. I read everything I could lay my hands on around the subject, made extensive notes. In London for a few months I mulled further on it and finally mustered up the courage to call Professor Gyanendra Pandey to explore the possibility of a PhD under his supervision. Gyan played a decisive role at the time in helping me shape, develop, and make my research proposal concrete. As my PhD advisor it was he who first read the initial drafts of two chapters and engaged me in long discussions at the India International Centre. Though my teacher, he also became a friend; he was always a great communicator, charmer, and supporter. When he left Delhi I virtually lost my bearings. Now I remember Gyan every time I look at sections of this work, and think that in some ways it was completed because I wanted to convey my respect for him and repay his confidence in me.

It was around the time Gyan left Delhi that I began sharing the bedrock of ideas on which this book is built with my friends Aditya Nigam and Nivedita Menon. Always intellectually sharp and politically alert, they offered support, comments, and encouragement. Later, when I was applying for a Sephis scholarship and subsequently being affiliated to the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in order to complete this book, Aditya did all he could to help my work. Nivi's support was especially critical at one point of time and I acknowledge it with very deep regard.

I also connected quite often with two acknowledged scholars, Ramachandra Guha and Jean Dreze, to get their comments and suggestions. Ram Guha, despite his many preoccupations, provided written comments and references for many chapters, and during my times of confusion and conflict stood by the value of my work. Ram's support has been invaluable and I thank him for all he has done for me. Jean Dreze commented on several chapters, reminding me of certain gaps, nuances, and new dimensions in dealing with my case studies, and suggesting certain positive changes. I was surprised and touched

when, after a gap of several years, he asked after the status of my research. Jean is a man difficult to thank—a wisp of a man, he becomes a will-o'-the-wisp before you can catch him to thank him.

I had heard of 'blessings in disguise' but saw one take the shape of Dilip Menon when he became my new research supervisor. It was a matter of pride and privilege for me that a distinguished historian like Dilip accepted me as his student. He was pleasant, thorough, innovative, and provocative, providing me with new references, books, and methodologies. His immense knowledge was never intimidating, on the contrary it was comforting. I owe him my sincere thanks and an apology for later having to drop out.

Support and encouragement also came from several distinguished scholars: Nandini Gooptu of Oxford University, when I was a visiting fellow at Queen Elizabeth House, discussed my topic threadbare. As a fellow at the Asia Centre of the London School of Economics and Political Science I had the benefit of comments on a draft chapter from Meghnad Desai, who showed keen interest in my work. Ghan-shyam Shah, David Hardiman, Jonathan Parry, Amita Baviskar, M.S.S. Pandian, and the late Krishna Raj contributed with suggestions. I also offer my sincere thanks to Ulbe Bosma and Ingrid Goehard from Sephis for supporting my research.

Satyadeep helped with the editing and proof-reading of my manuscript, for which I thank him. Finally, Rukun Advani, my editor and publisher, took great interest in this work and, with encouraging words and instant responses, got me, in the end, to part with the manuscript. The book is what it is in considerable measure due to him. Thanks also to Permanent Black's anonymous referee, whose report on my manuscript helped me rework many sections of this book.

In the world of NGOs and INGOs within which I have worked now the past several years, I remember and thank two of my former colleagues in the Heinrich Boell Foundation, an organization close to the Green Party in Germany. They saw the broad relevance of this topic and, driven by supportive feeling for a friend and colleague, selflessly helped me collect documents, translated them into English, and went over the text. For various reasons they do not wish to be

named, but I will always remember them for their solidarity and comradeship.

Other colleagues, friends, and acquaintances in this sector have shown their appreciation at different points and in various ways. To name a few, I acknowledge the support of John Samuel, Yamini Mishra, Salil Shetty, Richa Singh, Sana Das, Sheeba Mathew, and Sibha Mohanty.

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In the field of media and journalism, within which I still have a deep sense of belonging, *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Frontline*, and *Seminar* have given space to my writings. N. Ram, editor, *Frontline*, was the first to publish my piece 'Nature and Nationalism' in that magazine and, as always, I wish to convey warm thanks to him for his constant support. Ram Manohar Reddy, editor, *Economic and Political Weekly*, published three special articles of mine that prompted many people from India and abroad to send me enriching comments: my special thanks to Ram Reddy. Harsh Sethi of *Seminar* published an article based on this work: I have always found him generous and positive and thank him.

Some people become integral to one's life, whatever one does and wherever one lives. For me they are my friends Anand Swamy and Jeremy Seabrook, and my son Ishaan Sharma. Without them I am incomplete. They make me and my work whole. I would like to acknowledge here their life-saving importance for me and this book.

I began with Charu, but would like to end with another dedication: to Chandi Prasad Bhatt. An environmentalist, activist, amazing human being, father-figure, concerned neighbour, writer, communicator, villager, and traveller who inspires countless people like me in their everyday journeys of environmentalism and social activism.

In Charu and Chandi Prasadji I see all that is most precious to me.

Prologue

An Annual Puja, an Animal Sacrifice, a Fair

State: Bihar; District: Khagaria; Block: Auololi;
Village: Sonmanki

Four kilometres south from Khagaria town, at the Sonmanki ghat on the Bagmati river, a religious ceremony is beginning. The purpose of the ceremony, called Maa Kosi ka Mela (a fair in honour of Mother Kosi), held on the auspicious day of *paus purnima*, is to control land erosion caused by the Kosi and Bagmati rivers, which seasonally change course, bringing devastating floods in their wake. There is a chill in the morning air, but that does not deter the few hundred villagers—men, women, and children—of Sonmanki, Koyla, and Ladaura villages from attending the fair.

On the riverbank's sandy surface a temple of bricks and cement is constructed, but it is left incomplete. Here a big idol of Mother Kosi is installed. The idol-maker, Dinesh Kumar Paswan, explains to me that the idol broadly resembles that of the goddess Durga. Shown riding a crocodile, the idol has four arms; one of these holds a conch shell, another a discus. Along with the main idol is a small idol of Koshlaveer, bearing in his hand a spade. Four other idols are installed alongside—of Saraswati, Ganesh, Laxmi, and Kartik.

A head Brahmin arrives with his two disciples after a dip in the river. They don new clothes and sacred threads (*janeu*), then come into the temple and arrange prayer material in front of the idols—*chandan*, *dhoop*, *agarbatti*, fruits, flowers, coconut, sweets, and several other things. A fasting Brahmin, who has to be from the village, must

now join in prayer. The head Brahmin begins the puja by chanting mantras in Sanskrit. He lights the fire and periodically consigns various offerings to the flames. His disciples and the villagers follow him with offerings and chants. After an hour of prayer, an *arti* takes place in which everyone assembled participates. Dalits of the villages gather outside the temple and wait for the *arti* to come out; they are not allowed inside. The *arti* concludes and the chief Brahmin proceeds towards the river water. Everybody follows. Here a small goat is ready with red ribbons. The goat is bathed in the river, worshipped, and then drowned as a sacrifice to placate the river. Erosion, changes in river courses, and floods are wished away. A Dalit *ghatwar* is allowed to take possession of the drowned goat.

The beginning of the ceremony—the prayer—is over. Now the Sonmanki mela has formally begun and will continue for four days. A few women serve specially cooked food to the Brahmin and his disciples. He is given money and *dakshina*. He leaves the venue and will return on the fourth day to conclude the ceremony—to perform puja and *homjaap*, organize the idol immersion, and accept offerings and his service fees.

Indian culture has a long tradition of worshipping rivers. We worship Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. We live with rivers, and thus on some occasions like *kartik purnima*, *agahan purnima* and *magh purnima*, we first bathe in the sacred rivers and then worship them. The emergence of Kosi worship and fair is a reflection of our faith in rivers, in their flow in whatever form, and our deep commitment to environmental values inherent in our traditional culture. In flood-affected areas, this has a special significance ...

So says a report entitled *Nadiyon ka Swarup Murtiyon ke Roop Mein* (The Nature of Rivers in the Form of Idols), prepared by a local NGO which actively supports this kind of environmentalism. The fair looks like a shop window for various activities. There are swings, recreational performances, edibles, village plays, small circuses, wrestling and *kushti*, song and dance. Pappu Kumar, a major organizer of this fair, narrates that in the year 2000 four *natuas* (jesters) came to perform the dances and a city group enacted a play, *Sasta Khoon, Mahanga Pani* (Blood is Cheap, Water is Dear) and charged Rs 6000

to perform it. Altogether, about ten or twelve villages, including Sonak, Sonmanki, Koyla, and Ladaura, have joined in the festivities.

Kosi worship began in 1990 and the fair came into being in 1995. It began first in Sonmanki, Koyla, and Ladaura villages. A few years later, in 2001–2, it was also happening in slightly far-off villages such as Mohanpur. Some local NGOs began working to spread its appeal. Twenty-six-year-old Umesh Gupta claims to be the initiator of Mother Kosi worship, and the villagers acknowledge this. A petty trader and transport operator of Sonmanki village, Umesh is also a local leader. He says, 'Erosion due to the river changing course was fast approaching our village and, therefore, I thought of offering our prayers to the beloved river. When I shared my ideas with some other villagers and organizations active in the village, they gave a positive nod. In any case, we have long been worshipping the river in one way or the other.' Umesh and other villagers in Sonmanki now believe that from the time the worship of Mother Kosi began, the erosion affecting their village has decreased. They also believe this is so because the fair is held at a sacred place where ten years earlier the river flowed. The river is seen as an integral part of their collective life, being the source of all joy and sorrow. It is to be both 'loved and feared. 'We have always been with the Kosi river, and seen its different changing courses. The river gives us life. It can do anything to anybody', this is the refrain of Rajvir, a villager. Indeed, the Kosi is the source of everything—agriculture, fish, and fodder—and makes life possible for the majority of the people here.

Sonmanki is located between Kosi and Bagmati, two well-known rivers of the region. Land erosion, often caused by regular floods, affects the village seriously. The village is a large one, a big settlement with a long history. The people here, mostly Brahmins, Rajputs, Yadavs, Kurmis, and Musahars, cultivate the land and grow rice, maize, and sometimes vegetables—all at the mercy of rains and floods. A few families here own all the land, even as the majority of the population is landless. Most households have some cattle, but that is hardly sufficient for their food, nor even to provide supplementary income. A large number of people leave the village to seek casual employment, venturing to cities nearby and far off. The few who have land and money or access to private or government jobs live in

nearby towns and 'do some side business' in the construction and transport sectors. Here, there is no primary school, health centre; no roads and no electricity. Sonmanki and the villages nearby are situated precariously at the edge of every erosion. The regular floods, displacement, and destitution make life difficult and uncertain for most villagers. Crisis-ridden agriculture and seasonal labour remain the basis of the economy; living and working are often seen as endless, painful chores. Employment and food are scarce; getting a bare minimum entails tiring and unremunerative work. There are many additional dangers to cope with: rains and floods ruin the harvest; diseases break out and, with no immediate ways of getting medical attention, are a constant worry. Snakes are a real and persistent threat to life.

The villagers do not regard themselves as capable of controlling these events. They live in a world where things happen to them. Although a few developments are attributed to personal agency—habits like drinking liquor and gambling—most misfortunes are blamed on spirits or the anger of Mother Kosi. 'Mother Kosi is punishing me. She is unhappy; we all neglected and forgot her these many years', says Akhouri. Another says: 'We had always been blessed by our Mother Kosi and had lived happily here. However, in present times, this has stopped. The government and development projects are ruining us.' These too are beyond the control of the villagers, so they are responsible for their present misfortune. It follows that a range of methods is suggested to guard against environmental destruction.

It is possible that the villagers also have other methods, values, and traditions for environmental protection, for a variety of experiences and influences is at work. However, the villagers know beyond all argument that they are at the mercy of forces largely beyond their control. This sense of powerlessness pervades everything. It is the very context in which all cultural and environmental practices must be negotiated. A sense of low self-efficacy prevails in a range of situations, and the villagers are on the constant look-out for various personal agents. Traditional medicines, charms, and ritual offerings offer some protection in specific situations, but there are always others waiting in the wings. *Ma Kosi ka Mela* is one of them.

The physical environment that dictates the fortunes of Sonmanki and other villages is no different from the social environment. Five upper-caste landowners own a hundred acres of agricultural land. A dozen more own a sizeable proportion of the agricultural land in the region. There are also some new landowners from the city who are buying land for farms, brick kilns, plantations, and non-farm activities. 'We work on the land owned by *babu log* [masters]. The employment here is only for a few months in a year, but that is the only stable earning within our normal reach. The daily wages are Rs 30 to Rs 40, depending on the decision of the landowners', says Hariom, a scheduled caste landless worker in Ladaura village. In the recent past, landless labourers have been migrating more and more to various cities in search of work, and for this they depend on their masters. They need loans for their journey and the expenses back home; their families are given repeated loans or other help by the landowners' families. These relationships of power and protection operate in many ways: 'Every few months, the money orders come to the post office. Since the post office is at the *babu's* place, he receives it and gives us the money only after deducting some amount as interest. The draft can only be encashed through *babu saheb's* account', says a villager.

The balance of power lies here, with the landowner, the rich, upper-caste man. Physical and social environments feed into each other; both share a common feature: they are more powerful than the populace. Pappu, Umesh Gupta, and Rajeev Singh have land, money, and power. They spend thousands initiating the worship, the fair, the temple, the animal sacrifice. Umesh Gupta and Pappu claim to spend Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 every year on the puja and mela. They are the ones who invent, prevail upon, and manage traditions and cultures to suit their environment, to get what they need. Through this re-invention of traditional environmental and cultural values, a new fatalism is induced and celebrated. The power and will of the people to exert an influence on environmental processes is taken over by the dominant social powers. The powerful stand to gain the most from a conservative assertion of the status quo. They live at the cost of most of the rest, of those condemned to a sapping and fatalistic powerlessness.

1

Introduction

This book has emerged from, on the one hand, my interest in contemporary environmental issues and movements in independent India, and, on the other, my concern with the development of Hindu nationalist ideology and politics over the same period. Both these developments are significant markers of India in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. Most of the existing academic and journalistic literature tends to treat the two—environmentalism and Hindu nationalism—as discrete and autonomous, seldom perceiving that environmental issues have often been constructed and defined in new ways by Hindu nationalism. Complementing this, certain environmental movements and discourses, consciously or unconsciously, overtly or covertly, have expressed themselves in ways that aid articulations of revivalist and nationalist Hindu thought; in fact certain core components of Hindutva's ideology have become crucial rallying points for these movements. My book explores the interrelationships between the two. It does so by examining the articulation and activities of Hindu nationalist forces on environmental issues, specifically focusing on some prominent environmental initiatives in the various regions of India. It studies how a particular political ideology is invested with and made manifest in visions of nature, culture, and nation.

The term 'saffron' has specific connotations. It is often a religiously significant colour, particularly in Hinduism, within which it is associated with renunciation. In this book, however, 'saffron' is not

intended to denote any specifically religious activity, such as asceticism or the life of itinerant monks. Nor, by using the term, am I setting out to unravel Hindu religious thought, which is a separate subject for philosophical and historical exploration.¹ Rather, I use the word saffron to denote the political dimensions of drawing on colour imagery. Specifically, I look at the political practice of Hindutva, or 'Hinduness', which deploys the religious associations of the colour saffron for mobilizations—environmental and otherwise—that are unconnected with the practice of religion as ordinarily understood. In this sense, therefore, my book delves into the ideological and mobilizational core of Hindutva or Hinduness as politics, distinct from religiosity. Looking more microscopically, my work is therefore also closely concerned with those who may not always see themselves as carriers of an ideology, but who in practice implicitly advance the logic, objectives, and ways of seeing of that ideology. I argue that there is a 'greening of saffron' when Hindutva organizations make nature conservation part of their political ideologies and agendas. The other side of the same coin shows a 'saffronizing of green', which happens when environmental movements and organizations make Hindutva's cultural politics a fundamental aspect of their environmental discourse.

Hindu nationalism encompasses authoritarian cultural nationalists as well as Hindutva adherents and supporters, all of whom are out to remake Indian society, polity, ecology, and culture in myriad ways. This brand of nationalism has also played a critical role in shaping communal identities in India. Naturally, there is a rich and varied analytic literature on the subject which looks at Hindu nationalism's projects historically and as contemporary practice.² But this is

¹ As, for instance, studied in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky and Water*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000.

² Some of these are, Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990; Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989; Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence:*

not a literature that, for all its insight, has recognized the importance of ecology as a factor in shaping the contours of Hindu nationalism. By the same token, environmental movements in contemporary India have been extensively covered in the media, being complemented by a rich corpus of academic writings on the subject.³ Significant in their own right, this again is a literature, largely celebratory in tone, that has ignored the frequent intertwining of green politics with saffron imagery.

There are probably many reasons for writers on the environment missing seeing these links: political colour-blindness; anti-Nehruvianism or an anti-science worldview; hostility to modernist visions of development; a contempt for centralized planning, technology, and

Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990; Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994; Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, Delhi, Sage, 1991; Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996; Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999.

³ To mention just a few, Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain (eds), *The State of India's Environment 1984–85, The Second Citizen's Report*, Delhi, Centre for Science and Environment, 1985; Anil Agarwal, Darryl D'Monte, and Ujwala Samarth (eds), *The Fight for Survival: People's Action for Environment*, Delhi, Centre for Science and Environment, 1987; Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995; Ashwini Chhatre and V.K. Saberwal, *Democratising Nature: Politics, Conservation and Development in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2006; Walter Fernandes, Geeta Menon, and Philip Viegas, *Forests, Environment and Tribal Economy: Deforestation, Impoverishment and Marginalisation in Orissa*, Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1988; Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, Delhi, Kali for Women, 1988; Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, 1989, rptd Rani-khet, Permanent Black, 2010; Ramachandra Guha (ed.), *Social Ecology*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994; Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*, London, Routledge, 1995; Shekhar Pathak (ed.), *Pahar (Mountain)*, vols 1, 2, 3–4, Delhi, 1983, 1986, and 1989, respectively.

progress; upper-caste predilections; the valorization of and nostalgia for a supposedly more environmentally friendly past; a view of ecological activism as broadly benign; and a desire to celebrate the small, the rural, and the traditional.⁴ Feminist scholars have been more perceptive: unlike analysts of environmentalism they have frequently seen the links between gender issues and Hindu nationalism.⁵

This book attempts to bridge the lacuna. Unlike work on statist authoritarian interventions,⁶ or on the mobilization strategies of a democratizing under-class,⁷ it focuses on the unexplored cultural, ethnic, and sectarian dimensions of green issues in India, with a particular emphasis on the past forty years. It reflects on the general political trajectory of Indian politics over this period and locates environmental movements and debates within the contexts of that trajectory. It also seeks to reveal the transition from secular environmentalism to an environmentalism imbued with religiously emotive and sectarian issues, leading therefrom to the intermeshing of identity, power, and nature.⁸

In a wider historical and geographical context this subject—the coalescence of environmentalism with specific varieties of political activism and mobilization—has been sporadically documented in the

⁴ These are taken up in greater detail in various parts of the book.

⁵ See, for example, Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds), *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, Delhi, Kali for Women, 1995; Tanika Sarkar, 'The Woman as Communal Subject: Rashtrasevika Samiti and Ram Janmabhoomi Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 August 1991, pp. 2057–62; Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis (eds), *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, Delhi, Kali for Women, 1996; Paola Bacchetta, *Gender in the Hindu Nation: RSS Women as Ideologues*, Delhi, Women Unlimited, 2004; Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (eds), *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular: Women's Activism and Politicised Religion in South Asia*, Delhi, Kali for Women, 1999.

⁶ For instance, Annu Jalais, *The Forest of Tigers, People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans*, London, Routledge, 2009.

⁷ For instance, Ajantha Subramanian, *Shorelines: Space and Rights in South India*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009.

⁸ In this sense this book develops and amplifies issues raised in my essay 'Shades of Green', *Seminar*, 517, August 2003.

West.⁹ Scholars have pointed out that right-wing organizations in Europe and the United States have often taken a Green perspective onto their platform. They have also shown that biological explanations and ecological justifications have frequently been used to support fascism: many neo-Nazis, for instance, replicate Hitler's vegetarianism, as well as 'back to the land' movements and bio-dynamic farming.¹⁰ Others have reflected on similar dangers in present-day Green politics within the West, where traditional ecological conservation can easily shade into right-wing irrationalism or extreme romanticism. The key elements in such instances include the use of biological metaphors, a stress on the 'organic community' and the individual's need to merge with it, a Laurentian glorification of ritual, intuition, and the mystical, and a distrust of the rational.¹¹ These elements can all be found in certain kinds of ecological writing, especially those that promote 'deep ecology' activism—which shows an affinity with what might legitimately be called eco-fascism.¹² While providing important references and examples, there are crucial differences between these on the one hand and roughly analogous Indian instances on the other—as I will try to show.

At stake in this intermeshing of Green and Saffron is nothing less than the way people understand their humanity. It is paradoxical that

⁹ For example, Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989; Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, London, HarperCollins, 1995.

¹⁰ M. Bookchin, 'A Green Course', *Resurgence*, vol. 115, pp. 10–13. Bookchin shows how nature philosophy can be gravely abused. Hitler, for example, used biological analogies, notably those of race, soil, homeland, folk, and blood to underpin his viciously fascist-imperialist theories, and spoke of the homeland almost in an ecological sense.

¹¹ The oeuvre of D.H. Lawrence and writers of his ilk is widely recognized as crucial to the formation of this ideology in the twentieth century, though detailed consideration of such writers is obviously not part of the scope of this book.

¹² P.R. Hay, 'Ecological Values and Western Political Traditions: From Anarchism to Fascism', *Politics*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1988, pp. 22–9; Richard Peet and Michael Watts (eds), *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 268–9.

the environmental concerns of Hindu nationalists are occasionally expressed in virtually the language used by radical environmental and social movements. This simple and often disingenuous appropriation of language points to a serious problem: the emergence of communal and authoritarian discourses within the new social movements in India. Simultaneously, it indicates the ambivalences and multivalences in the vocabulary that is deployed: we are often faced with a situation where a single set of words can mean quite different things, depending on the discourse within which such words are placed. It would be naïve to assume that the entire content of the emerging environmental issues and movements is progressive, which is their claim. A large part of the panoply of environmental politics in India today in fact reveals some political allegiances or affinities with Hindu nationalist and authoritarian forces. Therefore, rather than uncritically endorse all environmental movements, or all visions of the environment, I analyse their limitations, as also the intractability and contradictions in their relationship to Hindu nationalism and communalism. It is now often said that 'those who want to reform society according to nature are neither Left nor Right, but ecologically minded.'¹³ Individuals, groups, and campaigns that take up environmental causes either see environmental work as political work, or claim that their politics lies beyond or above both Left and Right. At times, these are categorized as non-party, independent, or alternative political work. How tenable are these claims?

Environmental ideologies and worldviews define politics, nations, and development in diverse ways, with sharply contesting and contrasting visions of how to structure society, resources, classes, castes, people, landscapes, and culture. Today's environmentalism defines and proposes the contours of culture, community, tradition, and place in significant ways; it also helps perform important roles in identity creation and conservation. If this is true, then it is impossible to maintain that environmental politics is beyond Left and Right, nationalism and communalism, Brahmin and Dalit, authority and

¹³ Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, p. 48. She also says that politics according to nature is unambiguous.

democracy, nationalism and ultra-nationalism. Far from transcending these categories it is, in fact, being transformed by them.

The Greening of Saffron

The idea of dharma and activities based on it, and its exploitation for political purposes, have been central to the theory and practice of Hindu communal organizations. The Rashtriya Swayamasevak Sangh (RSS) regularly plugs into issues of ecology and world peace, and the interrelated critiques of Western materialistic and monolithic notions of truth that lead to the imperialist suppression of non-Western identities.¹⁴ There exist a series of teachings and activities pertaining to conservation, purification, and cleanliness—carried out through local organizations working among tribals, youths, students, women, workers, and farmers—which use a local idiom and vocabulary replete with alternative local epithets, but which are essentially the branch propaganda or local projects of the RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). For instance, the RSS argues that ‘The genesis of the Chipko movement is not only in the ecological or economic background, but in religious belief. . . . The religious basis of the movement is evident in the fact that it is inspired and guided by women.’¹⁵ Further: ‘The minds of Hindu people are slowly being awakened through Chipko, Appiko, Bishnois, Chetna Manch and other environmental movements.’¹⁶

The scope of ‘environmental’ activities by Hindu communal forces has widened since the 1980s. The VHP joined the anti-Tehri dam movement in a big way in the late 1980s; the Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray has repeatedly claimed to be a pure naturalist and environmentalist; the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)–Shiv Sena combine actively participated in the first phase of the anti-Enron agitation, which

¹⁴ Tanika Sarkar, ‘The Woman as Communal Subject’, p. 2059.

¹⁵ Anonymous, *Desh ki Chinta* (Concern for the Nation), RSS pamphlet, Delhi, 1988, p. 4. All translations from the Hindi are mine, unless otherwise specified.

¹⁶ Ibid.

got it global attention; the Hindu Right's overwhelming support to and initiatives in the coastal fishworkers' movement of the 1990s coincided with reclaiming the 'authentic' name for Bombay, namely Mumbai (after Mumbadevi, the goddess traditionally worshipped by Bombay's fisherfolk); the BJP and its affiliates actively campaigned 'to save Ram Setu' in the name of environment, religion, and society. These examples reveal not only a proactive concern for the environment but also political support for some well-known environmental movements.

The environmental concerns of Hindu authoritarianism can be broadly classified into certain themes that are valorized or demonized, depending on political context and requirement. These include eco-nationalism, eco-primitivism, eco-naturalism, the eco-enemy, Brahminical models, and cow protection. Focusing on these themes, Hindu environmental politics fabricates glorifications of 'Hindu' land, rivers, forests, community, tradition, self-reliant villages, and ancient nature philosophy; simultaneously it condemns modernization, Westernization, and globalization. Many of these elements can also be observed in various other prominent environmental movements and organizations in the country, though their perspective may vary somewhat. Overall, this is a scenario which shows the grounds being created for building a relationship between these two apparently opposed forces.

Hindutva's political agenda is often articulated via weaving environmental issues into its popular discourses. The vocabulary of environmentalism is deployed to censure 'foreign cultural domination', 'imported culture', 'the continued domination of Muslim culture', 'British-induced Christianity', and 'Western secular institutions and values'. Traditional environmental terms tie in nicely with the religious repertoire of sanitation, pollution, sacredness, purity, and purification, and these then link with aggressive right-wing idiom and political metaphor. The 'other'—not only excluded from the Hindu Right's environmental activities but also described as 'poison' in the blood of India—is thereby eliminated, at least discursively. The effect is to forge the Hindu Right's environmental discourse as a consciously planned extension of old boundaries into new frontiers. If the old

boundaries involved a rational environmentalist pedagogy and everyday practice of environmentalism, the new frontiers involve a militant posture on environmental issues within a larger metanarrative of Hindu nationalism, Hindu superiority, national purity, and the need for mass movements supporting these. This variety of environmentalism gives a platform to the RSS to extend its appeal beyond its defined constituency, and to forge an expanding public sphere.

There are obvious paradoxes and contradictions within this Greening of Saffron. For one, the animosity and call for brutal elimination of the other also find expression in the Hindu Right's relationship with environmental movements which challenge its views and domination within its traditional strongholds. For another, this situation is pregnant with possibilities as well as problems for Hindutva: to first nullify and then renegotiate the Enron power project; to oppose the Tehri dam but support the Sardar Sarovar dam; to try and extend its appeal to the marginalized within Hindu society while marginalizing all 'others'; to make alliances with some prominent environmental movements but secede from a large number of others.

The Saffronizing of Green

This book, however, focuses more on the obverse, namely the Saffronizing of Green. It does so by looking at some of the political shades within various environmental discourses, organizations, and movements over the past few decades, centrally Anna Hazare's Watershed Programme in Ralegan Siddhi, Maharashtra; Sunderlal Bahuguna and opposition to the Tehri dam in Garhwal; and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature's Vrindavan–Mathura Revival Project in Uttar Pradesh (UP). These three are used as umbrella case studies to explicate a constructive work effort (Ralegan Siddhi), a popular movement (Tehri), and a major NGO-backed reafforestation campaign in the North Indian area of Vrindavan which is considered sacred by many. In a variety of ways and contrasting styles, the politics of Hindu cultural nationalism infuses, interacts with, overwhelms, and retreats from the public and intellectual spaces represented by these sites. Different players enter the stage, and not all lines or roles are pre-scripted. What

unfolds may come as a surprise both to those who study ecological movements in India as well as to those familiar with Hindu nationalist politics.



The 'Vrindavan Forest Revival Project' in UP was jointly initiated by certain prominent environmental and religious organizations in 1991. Vrindavan has for long been constructed by folklore as the birthplace of Krishna, and, after what Hindutva terms the 'Ram Janmabhoomi liberation campaign' and the destruction of the Babri mosque, the 'liberation of Krishna Janmabhoomi' has become an ongoing part of its agenda. The vocabulary used to mobilize in favour of this environmental project underlines the causes of Vrindavan's environmental problems: these are the 'abandonment of traditional Hindu values and technology', 'centuries of Muslim and British rule detrimental to traditional Hindu culture and practices', and 'forgetting injunctions such as those found in the *Manu Smriti*'. The solutions suggested are based on an entirely new socio-political grounding which goes far beyond tree planting and improvements to the sewage system.¹⁷ Part of this discourse provides a defence of the caste system, which is increasingly being challenged by the rising lower and intermediate castes, especially in North India, the heartland of communalism. For instance, Kailash Malhotra, an anthropologist, claims that 'The caste system . . . was actually based on an ancient concept of sustainable development which disciplined the society by partitioning the use of natural resources according to specific occupations (or castes); and "created" the right social milieu in which sustainable patterns of resource use were encouraged to "emerge".'¹⁸ Or, as someone else puts it, 'The Hindu caste system can be seen as a progenitor of the

¹⁷ Flyer, *Vrindavan Forest Revival Project*, and Ranchor Das (project director), 'Reviving the Forests of Vrindavan', *Back to Godhead*, vol. 26, no. 5, September–October 1992, p. 27.

¹⁸ Kailash Malhotra, quoted in *The State of India's Environment 1984–85: The Second Citizen's Report*, New Delhi, Centre for Science and Environment, 1985, p. 162.

concept of sustainable development.¹⁹ This variety of environmentalism involves a politics of both inclusion and exclusion. Far from being a binding factor in Vrindavan conservation, Krishna becomes an entity claimed by a few to the exclusion of many. In fact, the deity becomes one of the symbols of discord and resistance because its adoption has led to specific groups in society being excluded from the conservation project.

Similarly, in Ralegan Siddhi, a supposedly ideal village which showcases rural development and water conservation, the integration of Dalits is based on a double-barrelled prescription: they have to perform duties and services in accord with the best traditions of the past; their salvation lies in accepting the Brahminical fold by adopting certain dietary, sartorial, and cultural habits laid down for them by caste Hindus. Nation, nation-building, nationalism, and ultra-nationalism, which have become the hallmarks of some prominent environmental initiatives, all find an echo in Ralegan Siddhi. The meaning of the Indian nation also takes specific shape here in the context of wars or the threat of war from neighbouring countries. Narratives of the war, the army, and the enemy remain core points of reference within the discourse on nation and rural development in Ralegan Siddhi. This particular developmental discourse of Anna Hazare, in which the army, war, and environmental engineering become one, as well as aspects of villager consciousness, are articulated in the form of a strict code and discipline. They are also linked to the ways in which the nation and its culture get conceptualized—nation as ideal, sufferer, and victim which must thus assert itself against the enemy. The efforts of rural development and its agents are intended to aid this process.

The enemy and threat perceptions occupy a similarly special place in the environmental identity of Sunderlal Bahuguna and the anti-Tehri dam activists. This identity is never fixed, it is always in a flux, in part because the threats change as the occasion demands. Mainly, the threats are seen as emanating from China and Chinese missiles, as

¹⁹ O.P. Dwivedi, 'Satyagraha for Conservation: Awakening the Spirit of Hinduism', in Roger S. Cottlieb (ed.), *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 159.

also from 'internal' enemies of India's national integrity and cultural unity. Environmentalism becomes part of a toolkit to protect this putative unity and integrity against internal and external aggression.

All three environmental movements studied herein reveal that purity and pollution, the sacred and the non-sacred, the holy and the unholy, the indigenous and the foreign, and in some cases the local and the migrant, all have an important bearing on notions of identity and the nation. Whereas pollution, in the modern environmental sense, normally relates to the material conditions of our natural surroundings, in the discourse of right-wing environmentalism pollution is additionally understood as the defilement of our natural, social, and cultural worlds by all that is declared unwanted, unwelcome, and alien. In this discourse certain things are decreed as heritage or as belonging to self and the nation, the purpose being to decree by implication that certain other things are alien. By this method some human groups are rendered clean precisely in order to render others dirty. This is a discourse within which understandings of the violation of nature are based on particular assumptions about what the natural and social orders should look like, who they should belong to, and how. The argument is that 'we', the 'pure', need a sacrosanct moral regime not only to be rid of liquor, smoking, non-vegetarian food, and promiscuity, but also in order to exercise a hypothesized Hindu control over the private and the public, the personal and the political. In this way environmental discourses, however well intentioned, fall into the trap of valorizing and romanticizing dangerous forms of indigenism and obscurantism.



In order to look in detail at what has been outlined in this Introduction, Chapter 2 explores the views of the Hindu communalists—including parties, groups, and thinkers—on the environment. It focuses on some of the central principles that comprise the core of their environmental ideology. This core often shows a startling similarity with the ecological principles of some Indian environmental organizations and initiatives. An overriding concern with social pollution, the invocation

of a mythical 'golden age' of Vedic India, the valorization of countryside and community, the idea of the nation as a product of nature, the defence of nature, nation, and nationalism, and a stress on the naturalness of the social order—all these are important environmental concerns in the ideology of Hindutva. The deployment of this world-view entails making common cause with environmental groups and movements. Environmentalism is therefore used as a Trojan Horse to carry an authoritarian ideology into the citadels of ordinary discourse and political debate. Hyperbolic crisis narratives of environmental collapse also provide an opportunity to rework and re-energize the categories of Indian national identity as Hindu and its enemies as all that true Hinduism must shun.

The three chapters that then ensue carry the central argument of the book via detailed analysis of three environmental initiatives. Chapter 3 examines Anna Hazare's programme of watershed development in Ralegan Siddhi and provides insights into ways in which an individual and his organization can play a central role in reshaping rural life. It explores the elusive but crucial element of a 'moral authority' which presupposes the existence of a traditional culture conducive to the exercise of such authority. The hegemonic functions of consent and conservatism come into the picture here. It seems peculiar that accounts of this important movement remain largely commemorative in nature and do not examine the ideology and politics of the experiment. It seems to me crucial not only for us to understand the present and future of these 'green villages', but also to interrogate the brand of environmentalism which underpins their greening. In spite of the apparent diversities that characterize Anna Hazare and Ralegan Siddhi, there is an underlying thread of unity within the ideological system of this form of green village, and this singularity of vision is what I try to show. Authority and legitimacy are a kind of double key to Anna Hazare's experiment. His is an authority deeply rooted in the dominant socio-political tradition of the region which often blinds the movement to many basic and universal issues connected with rights, democracy, and justice. An individual's overly personal moral authority, even as it substantially improves economic conditions within a village, also makes one ask if

it is also improving (or worsening) the possibilities for democratically organized and thinking communities that are being made free of the burdens of force, punishment, coercion, obligation, patronage, charity, and piety from, if not authoritarianism, then its close kin paternalism and patriarchy.

Chapter 4 focuses on Sunderlal Bahuguna and his opposition to the Tehri dam in Garhwal. The movement has been a significant marker for Indian environmentalism in general and struggles against big dams in particular. Big dams have been criticized both for the large-scale environmental transformation that they cause and for the social dislocations that inevitably follow their construction. Opposition to the Tehri dam began in the 1970s and much has been written about the dam's hazards and safety, about Sunderlal Bahuguna and his movement. Yet the language and politics of the movement, its visions of nation, history, and culture, and its alliance with specific varieties of politics have received scant attention. Least analysed seem to have been the shifts in the movement after the 1990s. I look specifically at these alterations, at the shifting contours of the movement and their implications. My attempt in doing this is to illuminate the changing declarations about and evocations of nature, religion, and nation by Sunderlal Bahuguna and the Tehri Bandh Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti (TBVSS) on the one hand, and on the other of the VHP, which too is deeply implicated in anti-dam politics.

Such analysis shows that opposition to the Tehri dam has never been some simple disagreement about viability or non-viability, costs and benefits, and the displacement and resettlement issues thrown up by large dam construction. The debate has been far deeper, striking at the heart of philosophical, cultural, religious, political, and moral issues within the idea of 'development'. Prominent environmental activists and groups have pitched in with arguments in support of the age-old purity and holiness of the Ganga. Hindu myth and belief, ideas of cultural pollution, and a variety of fears and conspiracy theories have been brought in too, transforming a supposedly environmental platform into a breeding ground for Hindu nationalism. The possibilities of enhancing their credibility by moving beyond the traditional and familiar politics of hate has made it seem imperative to

Hindutva to make common cause with Green issues. So the movement against the Tehri dam has become a means for combining everyday sacredness with protective impulse, the gravity of high politics with the solemnity of daily worship, and nature with nationalism. It has re-envisioned a river as a source of water into a political, moral, and emotional idea. Naturally, such collaboration between Green and Saffron raises larger questions about Hindu nationalism and Indian environmentalism. It would be simplistic to see the VHP's involvement with opposition to the dam as only a political attempt to harness votes for the BJP. In fact, it is their comfortable intermeshing with a stream of environmental discourse that needs to be taken into account. The Tehri movement always had within it the seeds of Hindu conservatism. But, with its political discourse, the Hindu Right has also shown that it has the power to absorb, co-opt, and reorient the political trajectory of an environmental movement.

I then move on to the Vrindavan Forest Revival and Conservation Project in UP, initiated by certain prominent environmental and religious organizations in 1991. We see here how the imagery and myth of a specific location reappear within an environmental context and encompass a whole environmental programme. It is apparent in this instance that the concern to protect and improve the environment of a religious location is not just a consequence of spirituality, imagination, and deep personal feeling among the proponents. Rather, valued places, powerful symbols, and representations work at different levels to create an intersection where place-specific religiosity, environmentalism, and Hindu authoritarian politics converge. Here, environmentalists transform a diversity of understandings, knowledges, myths, epics, and religious histories into a fixed and singular story that promotes a homogeneous and exclusive Hindu community. They use and manipulate, for their convenience, the various faces of Krishna offered in religious texts, transforming him into a deity that fits with the broader agenda of Hindutva.

Chapter 6 moves out of India to look at conservative environmentalism in Europe. Environmental issues have become one of the key concerns of conservative parties and have a considerable bearing on the support these groups harness in their countries.

Historically, environmental ideas and issues played a role in the making of Hitler, the Nazis, and National Socialism. One among a wide range of structural causes, the environment became an important tool in the hands of the Nazis, defining the cause of national identity and regeneration by giving these an added dimension of specificity pertaining to land and nature. Today, a diverse range of political parties, groups, and organizations in the West—ranging from the extreme right to neo-conservatives, traditional old parties to new political initiatives, party-affiliated support groups to independent think-tanks—betray strong threads that link their environmental outlook with their politics.

So there is a history to this convergence between Green and Saffron, as well as contemporary concerns animating it. Although recent as a phenomenon on this scale in India, many elements within these movements have roots in earlier notions of environmental protection or preservation. Chapter 7 examines some of the major lines of argument about development and environmentalism in India before and after Independence. Special attention is paid to a continuing 'nature and nationalism' tradition which is crucial for an understanding of the contemporary juncture. Although this tradition was not the only form of environmental reasoning that existed earlier, it has been one of the most visible, and its arguments have had a powerful resonance. So I explore the ideological continuities and discontinuities that exist between this earlier tradition and its recent editions, placing particular emphasis on Gāndhian environmental thought and beliefs.

In recent versions of this tradition, environmental degradation is the result of the imposition of modernization and development by a Western colonial civilization upon a rooted and indigenous Indian culture. This view is accompanied by a specific reading of Indian, largely Hindu, tradition. A strain of nostalgia colours several of the arguments that are provided by what some scholars have referred to as a 'new traditionalist' discourse. The pre-colonial Indian rural past is imagined to have been marked by harmonious social relationships and ecologically sensitive resource-use practices. If there is here a Proustian remembrance of time past, it is one which shows idealized local self-contained communities managing their own resources

sustainably and equitably. The corollary is naturally the trope of decline and decay in contemporary times.

The last chapter sums up the major themes and features of the authoritarian environmentalism and its politics which the preceding chapters have analysed. It argues that such environmentalism, far from being a specifically Indian phenomenon, is to be found in various countries in different forms. This coalescence of authoritarian politics and environmental values therefore confronts us with further questions pertaining to dissemination, reach, impact, and likely durability—nationally and internationally. In the specific context of the convergence between Green and Saffron in India, I try to tease out some conclusions about the nature of contemporary environmentalism and its complex relationship with Hindu nationalism.

Within the academic literature Hindu nationalism has been examined mainly in relation to communalism, culture, and religion. This is insufficient. In our time this political programme encompasses a wide range of new themes as well as non-market and non-materialist issues, including those pertaining to the environment. True, Hindu nationalist forces are scattered and often inconsistent when taking up environmental issues; true also that their electoral dividends are not heavily dependent on their cultivation of an environmental constituency. Likewise, it is true that environmental groups and movements with a tendency towards authoritarianism and communalism are only a few among very many. All these truths notwithstanding, the important point is that this kind of environmentalism has made huge inroads into popular consciousness and, in our time, gained a far wider acceptance in India and elsewhere, in theory and in practice. The impact of this convergence cannot therefore be gauged only by analysing electoral gains and extreme manifestations during apocalyptic moments of upheaval. They must also be seen at the macro level of changes in political-environmental discourse.

Explorations such as those provided in this book offer certain critical tools as well as a textured analysis for, I hope, an improved understanding of the complexities, nuances, and ambiguities of environmental and social politics. I believe it is not only unnecessary to valorize the past in order to critique modern development paradigms, but

that such valorization needs to be exposed for the political damage that it does. Environmental discourses which function in this manner are unacceptable because of their implications for social relations, as also their consequence for the distribution of benefits from resource-use and, indeed, ecological sustainability. A socially just and ecologically sustainable society cannot be created via the atavistic recrudescence implied in postulating the value of traditional socio-ecological relations, nor by religious, economic, and cultural nationalism. Fortunately, several environmental movements and activists are consistently and spiritedly resisting Hindu communalism. My intention in this book is both to record a history and to outline a politics which alerts secular environmental and social movements in independent India to the problems that arise by the coming together of Saffron and Green.

2

Hindu Nationalism and the Environment

Elements and Themes

The RSS and the BJP, widely seen as representing facets of Hindu communalism and nationalism, have become powerful forces in Indian politics over the past two decades. In the February 1998 general elections the BJP polled more than a quarter of the popular vote in India and emerged as the largest party in the Lok Sabha. In late March 1998 the party's leader Atal Behari Vajpayee became prime minister in a coalition government formed by the BJP and twelve regional parties. Earlier, in the 1989 parliamentary elections its vote-share had risen to 11.4 per cent from 7.4 per cent in 1984 (when it had won only two seats), and it won 89 seats in the Lok Sabha, emerging as the third largest party in the country. By early 1991, with 119 seats in the Lok Sabha, and a 19.9 per cent share of the total votes, it had become the second largest party.¹

Students of Hindu communalism have offered various interpretations of its ideology and the reasons for its growth. Some explain this party's current power as a result of decades of systematic, painstaking organizational work and imaginative political strategies.² Others

¹ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 3–5.

² Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in Indian Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

understand this growth in more cultural and historical terms, arguing that the Hindu nationalists may have been successful because they drew on older reserves of 'religious nationalism' that had long been central to most forms of Indian nationalism.³ Some others not only emphasize the institutional groundwork that supports the politics of the Hindu Right and the long history of its meticulously organized efforts towards a Hindu Rashtra, but also underline that, particularly in its existing incarnation, it is engaged in fundamental forms of religious engineering—which is how its political agenda differs most significantly from that of other right-wing formations.⁴ It has also been argued that saffron politics has emerged and taken shape neither in the political system as such nor in the religious field, but in the broader realm of what we may call public culture—the public space in which a society and its constituent individuals and communities imagine, represent, and recognize themselves through political discourse, commercial and cultural expression, and the representation of state and civic organizations.⁵

The saffron brigade, in the period of its phenomenal growth, took environmentalism as one of its important planks in order to articulate its broader socio-political goals. Environmental issues became vehicles to carry forward a particular politics. In its election manifesto of 1998 the BJP outlined a policy on the environment:

The BJP believes in the traditional Indian position that Nature is sacred. The *Atharva Veda* sets out the principle that nature is the mother of humans and that human beings owe a responsibility to maintain the ecological balance. The BJP will ensure institutional measures to bring about ecological security so that all developmental programmes are in conformity with the principles of sustainable development.⁶

³ Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994.

⁴ Tapan Basu *et al.*, *Khaki Shorts, Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*, Delhi, Orient Longman, 1993.

⁵ Hansen, *Saffron Wave*.

⁶ Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), *Election Manifesto 1998*, p. 44.

Earlier, during the mid-term elections of 1991, the BJP had pledged to halt the 'degradation of the environment and disturbance of the eco-system' because 'our land, air and waters, our hills, forests, flora and fauna, are all sacred to us. We will keep them neat, clean and intact.'⁷ The party's ally, the Shiv Sena, followed suit. Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu of the Shiv Sena became the union minister for environment and forests in the BJP-led government in 1998 and undertook 'a series of measures for imparting a new impetus to the task of protecting the environment and conserving forests and wildlife.'⁸ Prabhu repeatedly enunciated his views on the environment:

The economic development that has been achieved has brought in its wake many unwanted consequences with effects on our natural resources. The forest cover has diminished. Our rivers are affected by pollution. Mining and other industrial activities have led to the degradation of land. Words cannot adequately capture my genuine concern for the environment. I am reminded of a Cree Indian prophecy which reflects my own thoughts: 'Only after the last tree has been cut down, Only after the last river has been poisoned, Only after the last fish has been caught, Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.'⁹

The VHP plugs into issues of ecology along the same lines. A series of teachings and activities pertaining to conservation, purification, and cleanliness have been organized through local organizations using alternative local vocabularies. Essentially these have worked as branches or local projects of the VHP among tribals, students, women, workers, and farmers.¹⁰ The VHP took up the issue of the Tehri dam's

⁷ BJP, *Towards Ram Rajya: Mid-Term Poll to Lok Sabha, May 1991—Our Commitments*, Delhi, 1991, pp. 28–9.

⁸ Ministry of Environment and Forests, *125 Days of New Government: New Programmes and Initiatives*, Delhi, n.d., p. 1.

⁹ Interview with Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu in Delhi, 5 July 1998. Also see, Suresh Prabhu, 'Environment Education: Need of the Hour', *Organiser*, 16 August 1996, pp. 44–5, and 'Green Guards to Protect Environment: Suresh Prabhu', *Organiser*, 20 June 1999, p. 7.

¹⁰ Sadanand Damodar Sapre, *Param Vaibhav ke Path Par*, Delhi, Suruchi Prakashan, 1999. This book gives a detailed account of organizations affiliated with the RSS. For example, the Akhil Bharatiya Vanwasi Kalyan Ashram

situation on the holy river Ganga. Swami Chinmayanand, a BJP MP who has been closely associated with the VHP's anti-Tehri-dam campaign and who also works actively in other programmes of the organization, claims:

Environmental issues and concerns are nothing new for the VHP. The purity of Ganga is not the only issue that we are taking up. The sanctity and sacredness of our environment is closely related with the sanctity of our culture. Since the early 1990s, we have been raising the issues of environmental and cultural pollution, and organising *yatras*, campaigns and meetings on these.¹¹

The saffron brigade has in these ways sought to evolve a running theme on the environment, one which continues beyond election times, and has launched specific campaigns around environmental issues. Their theme shows India in the light of a holy land whose earth, air, water, hills, forests, flora, and fauna are all sacred. What is sacrosanct needs to be kept pure:

The attachment to forests, trees, flora and fauna is part of India's ethical consciousness. There is a need to revive this and to involve the people in this concern. We need to comprehend that ecological and environmental concerns are not mere elitist posturing. Unfortunately, this is precisely what they have been reduced to by the present generational order. In our context it does not make sense to mouth borrowed Western clichés on the theme.¹²

works among tribals to conserve forests and forest regions. The Bharatiya Kisan Sangh is active among farmers for cow and cattle protection, and for the conservation and development of flora and fauna. In the hilly region, Uttaranchal Utthan Parishad is working for rural and environmental development. The Bharat Vikas Parishad works on environmental issues. The Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad takes up issues relating to environmental laws. Laghu Udhog Bharti is active in relation to environment-friendly technology, polluting industries, and the small-scale sector.

¹¹ Interview with Swami Chinmayanand in Haridwar, 26 July 2000.

¹² BJP Pamphlet no. 30, quoted in Gurdas M. Ahuja, *BJP and the Indian Politics: Policies and Programmes of the Bharatiya Janata Party*, Delhi, Ram Company, 1994, pp. 5–7.

Such constant engagement, apart from being an attempt to capture public space for immediate electoral ends, bears an uncanny resemblance to some of the prominent environmental movements in the country. At a conceptual and programmatic level, paradoxically, Hindu nationalist environmentalism and progressive environmental movements and organizations have a great deal in common. Probed deeper, the Hindu Right's environmental concerns reveal how these two apparently opposed forces can be interrelated.

Though the saffron brigade comprises different sets of organizations, emphases, and programmes, their environmental concerns can be broadly classified into three themes: eco-nationalism, eco-primitivism, and eco-naturalism. The prism of pollution shines through all three. At one level pollution is a physical, material fact, which has to do with contamination in general—of land, water, and air by industries and urban centres, and via non-biodegradable materials and hazardous chemical wastes.¹³ At another it is specific to developing countries, which are often the dumping grounds and waste disposal heaps of some advanced countries.¹⁴ At a third level pollution is a socially constructed cultural phenomenon. Pollution dilutes and vitiates a hypothetically pristine socio-cultural fabric. As an identifiable alien element in a given natural order its removal becomes the necessary condition for the restoration of that order. That which is natural and native is a priori superior to the foreign. From this it follows that cultural pollution is an invasion against the values and lifestyles of time-tested Hindu codes and honour, a conspiracy which shows the evil designs of Christianity, Islam, and others.¹⁵ An extended

¹³ BJP, *Election Manifesto 1998*, p. 44.

¹⁴ Dattopant B. Thengadi, *Global Economic System: A Hindu View*, Delhi, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM), n.d., pp. 10–11.

¹⁵ 'RSS Calls for Atmosphere Free of Cultural Pollution', *Organiser*, 26 March 2000, pp. 9–10. Also see SJM, *Rebuilding the Nation: A Swadeshi Outline*, Delhi, n.d., p. 28. In this pamphlet, 'resisting cultural pollution' and 'protecting national interests' are emphasized together. Brahma Kumaris' World Spiritual University, *Science, Spirituality, Ethics and Environment*, Mount Abu, 1991, pp. 14–23. It is explained here that the most significant variety of pollution, which is the seed of all other types, is mental pollution. This makes it essential to safeguard ourselves from both environmental as well as mental pollution.

identification of spheres of pollution within the human and natural worlds, nature and culture, is characteristic of Hindu communalism. The native and the foreign, those who belong and those who do not, are carefully separated.

Eco-Nationalism, Eco-Primitivism, and Eco-Naturalism

The unified national consciousness of the people can be roused only by appealing to the inherent spirit of nationalism dormant in every heart. The first and foremost aspect of this spirit is to look upon Bharat not merely as a territorial entity but as our adored Motherland.—H.V. Seshadri, RSS¹⁶

National identity would lose much of its enchantment without the mystical appeal attributed by cultural nationalism as being inherent within particular territories and landscapes. National symbols are constructed to reflect and consolidate historical continuities associated with specific territorial landscapes: natural contours, rivers, mountains, and forests are explored, mapped, lived in, and transformed into a homeland. National landscapes are thus always imagined as unique, and notions of belonging and identity within each unique national landscape are always defined in terms of what is supposedly internal and exclusive to that landscape. A nation thus comes to be embodied in nature and its several manifestations, and the nationalist in the avatar of fundamentalist declares that such embodiment cannot be shared with non-national others. It cannot, in principle, be shaped by external forces, for only that which has been defined as prior and internal is non-polluting.

One way of explaining this 'natural imperative' within nation-making myths is by looking at the influence of scriptures upon communities that have discursively constructed nations. The argument among Jews that God's gift consecrated the land of Israel for the Jewish people, a notion backed up by British and American imperial power after the First World War, came as a shot in the arm not just for the

¹⁶ H.V. Seshadri, 'Thinking Workers and Working Thinkers: That's What We Need', *Manthan*, vol. v, no. 4, November 1984, p. 13.

creation of Israel but for other communities which had long maintained that their lands too be declared sacred. The river Ganga has a mythical significance no less than the river Jordan and there seemed to twentieth-century Hindus no reason why it should not be seen as sacred, and exclusively so, by Hindus. Another way is to look at the basis of human nature and allegiance to territory. A theoretical analysis, *Human Territoriality* by R.D. Sack, classifies many kinds of human orientation towards territoriality. Nationalism, according to Sack, arises from a combination of two categories: reification and displacement. This combination can result in a mystical perspective, which attributes authority to territory: 'The territory is a physical manifestation of the state's authority, and yet allegiance to territory or homeland makes the territory appear as a source of authority.'¹⁷ Natural contours can also be binding, blinding, commanding, and beyond logic, eliciting both patriotism and xenophobia: 'It would seem that we have here the sublime and the ridiculous. God's gift on the one hand, and the fatherland as a biological instinct, on the other.'¹⁸

Another scholar writing on the relationship between traditional nationalism and modern environmentalism, Daniel Deudney, argues that our sense of national identity is constructed not only around attachments to fellow members of the national community as well as shared history, traditions, and political institutions, but also around a 'feeling of connectedness to a particular place or area', a 'being here' feeling. For Deudney, this component of national identity can be seen in evocations of place within political symbolism—for example, in national anthems, which refer to particular places in summoning up images of the nation—as well as in the rhetoric of nationalism, which includes the naturalizing of citizens. He also believes that much modern environmentalism can be seen as harnessing the emotive identification of national identity to a cosmopolitan spirit through

¹⁷ R.D. Sack, *Human Territoriality*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 38.

¹⁸ Hedva Ben-Israel, 'Hallowed Land in the Theory and Practice of Modern Nationalism', in Benjamin Z. Kedar and R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (eds), *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, New York, New York University Press, 1998, pp. 278–94.

the rhetoric of what he calls 'earth nationalism'. Environmentalism has replaced the traditional nationalist rhetoric of motherland and fatherland with another that is more universalist, emphasizing mother earth as every individual's true nation.¹⁹

Hindu communal forces, it seems to me, root themselves in a tradition of nature and nationalism and transform it into ultra-nationalism. Their ideas on the nation, its past, and its people are grounded in ecology, making the natural contours of the nation seem supreme and as lying far beyond the choice of an individual citizen. Because the nation has to be protected from the onslaughts of others, its membership is defined not in terms of the sovereignty of individuals but as that of the natural world. Environmental protection coalesces with the nationalist imperative of preventing the nation from being polluted, and, with Hindu culture having been valorized and equated with national culture, a process that might be called political synonymization—the creation of a singular identity via eliding or collapsing separate concepts into each other—is brought about. Such evolution of nationalism into ultra-nationalism has been noticed by historians. Kedourie, in his analysis of this evolution, says: 'A nation, to the French revolutionaries, meant a number of individuals who have signified their will as to the manner of government. A nation, on this vastly different theory, becomes a natural division of the human race, endowed by God with its own character, which its citizens must, as a duty, preserve pure and inviolable.'²⁰

Ultra-nationalism believes membership in the nation is defined not by the sovereignty of individuals but by natural factors such as ethnicity, religion, blood, and language. Membership of this is normally acquired at birth and is therefore difficult, if not impossible, for those who do not belong from the start. In the words of one adherent of this worldview, 'This vast land is our "motherland"—this is our deep faith and keeping this faith is a symbol of our nationalism.

¹⁹ Daniel Deudney, 'Ground Identity: Nature, Place, and Space in Nationalism', in Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (eds), *The Return of Culture and Identity to International Relations Theory*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1995, pp. 129–45.

²⁰ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, p. 51.

We all are her sons and service to her is our duty. This land has made our life possible as a nation. Thus we have made it our natural duty to expand its name through our services . . . the Indian nation is a Hindu nation and this land is a Hindu land.'²¹ Land, motherland, culture, and religion are here all natural, given, ecological, and organic entities. Furthermore, only those who already belong can be faithful and true nationalists: 'The earth gives us all that we need. That is why we pray [to] the earth as our mother. The same sentiment is echoed by the word "motherland" . . . This is the reason why only a Hindu remains faithful to his *stree-mata*, *bhoo-mata*, and *bharat-mata*. This is a special quality or symbol of the life system of Hindus.'²²

The next step is to harness land, water, rivers, and mountains to construct a specific national identity. Ashok Singhal, a leader of the VHP, deploys the Ganga for their environmental campaign: 'To us Bharatvasis Ganga is no river; it is a deity. Ganga is the Divine Mother in whose bosom every son of the *devbhumi* Bharat feels that indescribable spiritual experience where words fade into silence. If Bharatiya *sanskriti* could be symbolized in one word, that one word is "Ganga".'²³ The river as personification of Hindu holiness shades into a call for cleanliness of self and country: 'O Holy Mother Ganga!

²¹ Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar, *Dheyey-Drishti* (Aim-Vision), Delhi, Suruchi Prakashan, 1997, p. 15.

²² RSS, *Hamein Hindu Hone ka Garwa Hai: Kya?* (Proud to be Hindu: Are We?), Uttar Pradesh, n.d., p. 13. There are a large number of writings of this kind by several ideologues and writers who belong to Hindu conservative organizations. For example, see K.S. Sudarshan, 'The Western and the Hindu Way of Life', *Organiser*, 18 February 1996, p. 2, where he emphasizes that ecological balance is the key to Hindu philosophy. Thus, Hindus have accorded the status of mother to nature and refer to mother-nature as Bhoomimata, Gangamata, Gomata, Tulsimata. Also see Narendra Sehgal, *Ram Arthat Rashtra* (Ram Means Nation), Delhi, Utpal Prakashan, 1995, pp. 17–20. Here the writer argues that the Indian notion of nation has an inherent and quite important element of land, *matribhoomi*, *pitribhoomi*, *punyabhoomi* and *nagar-nadiya-parvat*. Nature has decided the nation, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Sindhu to Brahmaputra, and this is why no partition is acceptable to Indians.

²³ Ashok Singhal, 'The Tehri Dam: A Monstrosity that Would Sound the Death-knell of the Sacred Ganga', *Organiser*, 28 June 1998, p. 2.

Yamuna! Godavari! Saraswati! Narmada! Sindhu! Kaveri! May you all be pleased to manifest in these waters, with which I shall purify myself and my country.²⁴

As a holy mother the river is also invoked in the fight against polluting enemies. The RSS's journals regularly publish on the might of Hindu rivers and push their power into contemporary political contexts:

Dear Ganga, the current of the Saryu river has risen. You too must arise!

Draw within your folds the vast pollution that has collected!!

Come mother, come!!

The grave of communism has been dug.

Blood is filled with the exploitation of wealth.

The earth is burning with Saddams.

Come mother, come!!²⁵

The most significant threats to the environment being from Western values, systems, and modes of development, these can be connected to the ecologist's model of nature because the Hindu communalist views society as a natural ecosystem in a manner analogous to the ecological perception of the natural world. This view comprises two interrelated streams: first, that while ecosystems are diverse—naturally and socially—each system possesses unique characteristics. Second, that preserving these unique characteristics is essential to the health and survival of that system. These two notions are important because they relate to a principle drawn from ecology: namely, that the introduction of a foreign species into an ecosystem threatens ecological balance. In the conservative ecological discourse of the communalist this idea is used to argue that the nation is a unique and fragile natural entity endangered by external pollutants. Diversity is valorized primarily as the existence of various ecosystems/nations, not as something desirable within each. On the contrary the social and natural health of each such entity depends on doing everything to preserve

²⁴ 'O Holy Mother Ganga', *Manthan*, vol. VI, no. 3, October 1985, p. 6.

²⁵ Chandrakant Bhardwaj, 'Ganga ka Aahwan' (The Call of Ganga), *Manthan*, vol. 12, no. 5, May 1991, p. 72.

the ecological balance—the unique, pure, and holy characteristics internal to that system.

These broad contours of the nation as ‘natural ecosystem’ can be seen in the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM), an organization initiated by the RSS, which makes a clear-cut distinction between two men, two worlds, and two systems when making a case for ancient Indian wisdom *vis-à-vis* the nation:

Encouraged by a theology that legitimized man’s dominance over nature, Western man started looking upon himself as the centre of the universe, ignoring his neighbours and his environment and the delicate balance inherent in nature. Because of this mentality, Western man started perceiving the universe as a machine and devised a philosophical justification for exploiting nature and his neighbours. This view arose out of the denial of sacredness to nature.²⁶

Simultaneously, the SJM’s argument goes, ancient Indian intellect, by contrast, always perceives the all-pervasive unity and oneness of creation. Hinduism’s ‘man’ is apparently forever in a relationship of mutual interaction and harmony with nature and his fellow Hindus. Ancient Indian wisdom is characterized by certain well-accepted principles of life on this earth, such as ‘integral relationship with nature, ruling out exploitation’, and ‘unity underlying diversity in nature and society’.²⁷

In the SJM’s worldview environmental destruction, like Cerberus, comes under many heads: both capitalism and communism are forms of this monster because both have originated the same drift towards consumerism. Exploitation of the environment is seen as inherent in both. The Akhil Bharatiya Grahak Panchayat, another outfit of the RSS, views America as the main enemy of the environment. Bindu-madhav Joshi, president of the panchayat, remarks: ‘With the slogan of “consumerism”, America has announced “consumers of the world unite”’. Because of this, commodity culture has taken birth there. This is how today’s situation has come about, where man exists only for

²⁶ SJM, *Rebuilding the Nation*, p. 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the commodity. For the satisfaction of this undignified consumption, a process of merciless plunder of natural capital has been initiated. Our natural and mineral resources have now virtually ended.²⁸

The West, as a whole, is Atilla the Hun reincarnate. It blindly slaughters human beings, animals, birds, sacred cows, tribals; in its wake fall monuments, temples, homes, because 'For them [Westerners], a tree is merely wood or fodder, a cow or a buffalo is just meat. Why be surprised if this consumerist view takes root everywhere—from all living and non-living organisms to human beings (and especially in women)?'²⁹ But, says an RSS mouthpiece, 'Their mischief cannot succeed so long as Hindus continue to cherish their cultural traditional values. The intense love with which they identify themselves with the country and its cultural heritage rules out any breach in it. This realization has prompted them to damn and denigrate Hindu pride and their glorious past and present a distorted image of Bharat before the world.'³⁰ Plants and animals belong naturally to a particular ecosystem, and so do people: ethnic and religious groups have their specific natural spaces.³¹ This is how Hindu authoritarianism defines nature and nation.

A related myth is that ancient India of a Vedic 'golden' age and other such gilded periods harmonized with the countryside and the

Akhil Bharatiya Grahak Panchayat,
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Invoked the concept of
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Hindu Bhumi, a vast and varied stretch of land, sustains the physical, material, and spiritual life of Hindus, the people of Hindustan, irrespective of caste, creed, and language. Natural contours, a specific ethnicity, and religion determine motherland, fatherland, and holy land.

community and possessed a kind of primitive ecological wisdom. This is widely held by Hindu nationalists and occupies a very prominent place in their environmental thought. The view that their glorious past—non-industrial, rural, agricultural, pastoral—was ecologically sound and its people paragons of ecological virtue has been occasionally articulated in environmental thought. Kay Milton identifies at least five elements in this vision: first, in accordance with the romantic tradition of idealizing the natural, the most ecologically sound ways of living are assumed to be those that conform most closely to what is seen as a 'natural' existence. In turn, the most natural ways of living are assumed to be those that appear to transform the environment the least, leaving it as close as possible to its raw state. Second, because the image of primitive ecological wisdom is born out of a comparison with industrial practice, it tends to be shaped by issues of concern within industrial society. Third, proximity to industrial society has directed the spotlight towards some non-industrial societies and not others. Fourth, there is a greater respect for the indigenous peoples of the region than for inhabitants whose origins lie elsewhere. Fifth, environmental thought has focused more on the human inhabitants of certain ecosystems and not others because the ecosystems focused on have been, for various reasons, the centre of environmentalist concern.³²

This myth of past glory is also an implicit valorization of caste, of a relationship of individuals to society in which service to those who hold society's political, economic, and cultural strings by those who do not is part of the reason for the past having been so golden. This past becomes an image of the country in its ideal state of environmental harmony, peace, and stability, to be contrasted with destruction, crisis, and depredations in the present, all perpetrated by others. In this environmental narrative, in fact, the caste system is a sustainable and ideal system within which everyone lived and worked as part of an

³² For a detailed account on the myth of primitive ecological wisdom, see Kay Milton, *Environmentalism and Cultural Theory: Exploring the Role of Anthropology in Environmental Discourse*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 106–41.

organic community. Nana Deshmukh, a prominent figure in RSS ideological circles, says:

Bharat is primarily referred to as an agricultural country. However, before the British, the population of every village fulfilled its needs through small industries at the local level . . . In ancient times, castes were formed on the basis of industry and commerce. This system has continued for generations . . . Children were trained in their homes. There was no scope for unemployment. Daughters of the same caste came into homes as daughters-in-law. They were also trained in the same vocations. Ideally, all men and women were involved in their given trade.³³

The village is another essential element of the Hindu idealized past. Villages, villagers, and village life, based either on Manu's philosophy or Sanatana Dharma, is seen as the simplest way of life, free of environmental destruction and socio-economic conflict. Sometimes it is said: 'India's village region has not been a workshop of agriculture-industry. Rather, it has been a region for the spread of *satvik* culture and values. Manu's *grihasth-ashram*, which is the best among all *ashrams*, can be seen in these villages . . . The vision of a village life system propounded by Maharaja Manu, the originator and founder of Indian culture and values, was the best.'³⁴ At other times kings and queens, rich people, sadhus and saints—the so-called ancestors of

³³ Nana Deshmukh, 'Parivartan ke Saath Arthik Vikas' (Economic Development along with Change), *Manthan*, vol. 16, no. 1, April–June 1995, p. 10. Also see O.P. Dwivedi, 'Satyagraha for Conservation: Awakening the Spirit of Hinduism', in Roger S. Cottlieb (ed.), *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 159. The author, quite sympathetic to the Hindu forces, says that the Hindu caste system can be seen as a progenitor of the concept of sustainable development.

³⁴ See the three-part article by Rabindranath, 'Bharat mein Gramon ka Uday' (Rise of Villages in India), 'Jivan-Pranali ke Nirman mein Gaon ka Yogdan' (Contribution of Villages in the Formation of Lifestyle), and 'Bharatiya Krishi Paddhatti mein Gramon ki Bhoomika' (The Role of Villages in Indian Agricultural Methods), *Manthan*, vol. 11, no. 7, July 1991, pp. 11–15; vol. 11, no. 8, August 1991, pp. 17–21; vol. 11, no. 9, September 1991, pp. 17–21, respectively. The articles extensively quote from the *Manu Smriti*

all good Hindus—are upheld as the heroes and heroines who made up this past; they made plantations, they encouraged the digging of tanks, they lit the lamp of ancient environmental conservation.³⁵

Next, agriculture: Hindu nationalists almost see agriculture as required less for food and wealth than for religion and culture. For a true Indian, it appears, growing food is in itself a religious act, and the Hindu farmer is really always engaged in an act of intense worship. The Dharma Sadas—a congregation of *dharmacharyas*—during a gathering to deliberate and pronounce upon the dharma of growing and sharing food, supposedly said: ‘The prevalence of scarcity and hunger in India is not merely an economic failure, it is a moral failure, it is a grim pointer to our failure to protect and nourish the Sanatana Dharma . . . India’s land and people are languishing as a result of our failure to remember our traditions. We have to re-anchor ourselves in Sanatana Dharma.’³⁶

A superstructure of justifications for hoary tradition and belief supplements the more materialist rationalizations of caste, village, and agriculture for socio-environmental balance. The Rashtriya Jagran Abhiyan (RJA), an organization affiliated with the RSS, argues that beliefs which help in forest conservation may be blind, or may have no logical explanation, but must be pursued for conservation: ‘there is the law of Karma, or the concept of Sin. If one cuts a living tree, or kills an animal for no reason, one incurs sins. Whether one actually incurs sin and whether one has to get rid of this karma by toiling in

to illustrate that Indian villages and agriculture were self-reliant, that the indigenous lifestyle was pious, pure, and in accordance with Vedic principles, that villagers led a natural life, and nature was worshipped in every village. Also see Vijayshankar, ‘Gramon se Nagron ki ore Badhta Palayan’ (Increasing Migration from Villages to Towns), *Manthan*, vol. 18, no. 1, January–March 1997, p. 24. The article says that Indian villages were very prosperous and self-sufficient units as a result of the good work and thoughts of Hindu saints.

³⁵ Vyas, ‘Paryavaran Sanrakshshan’, p. 63.

³⁶ ‘Growing Food is a Religious Act: Dharma Sadas’, *Organiser*, 29 December 1996, p. 10. Also see Rabindranath, ‘Bharatiya Krishi Paddhati mein Gramon ki Bhoomika’ (The Role of the Village in the Indian Agricultural System), pp. 17–21.

hell are rational questions. But rationalism does not always work; faith achieves what rationalism can't.³⁷

The tendency to naturalize social phenomena—to look at the laws of nature as a model for social order or describe society in the language of nature—has a long history. Its modern ecological variant can be traced to the relatively new insight that all human actions have serious environmental consequences. Environmentalists of every hue have argued that the failure to recognize these consequences lies in the misguided view of humans as somehow *above* nature. Humans must instead be viewed as being *in* nature, as biological beings subject to the same kinds of processes as other biological beings.

This thesis, that humans are a part of nature and that environmental concerns must guide politics, is highly ambiguous. It can be understood in a normative political sense in two ways: one, as a regulative ideal; or, two, as a comprehensive worldview. The first interpretation suggests that politics should take the findings of ecological science as a tool for bringing ecological concerns to bear on the ideology and practice of politics, without, however, basing politics on any of the supposed teachings of ecology. The second interpretation, by contrast, suggests that ecological science provides a new vision of the natural world, and since man himself is a being of nature the teachings of ecology must be made the basis of politics. By naturalizing social and political phenomena this latter interpretation transforms ecology into a comprehensive worldview; within it ecology is understood as a kind of meta-science that both describes and prescribes. Accordingly, nature is held up as a model for the social order—an order to which humans must submit, because nature makes no mistakes.

Such eco-naturalism is an important element in the environmental discourse of Hindu nationalists. It is entwined with the idea that the nation itself is a product of nature. This view is visible not merely in Hindu nationalist writings and speeches, but also in the concepts and language they use to express social relationships as well as argue for environmental protection. Among the most telling of

³⁷ RJA, *Hindu Samskriti and Environment*, Delhi, Suruchi Prakashan, 2000, p. 11.

these concepts is the coupling of environmental protection with the protection of life *in its natural order*. By this I mean that, while defining their development strategy for a better life, Hindu nationalists not only underline human life as an expression of nature but—and this is the important point—also justify the supposed naturalness of the social order. They suggest there are certain fundamental principles of nature—such as recycling, symbiosis, antibiosis, and stability—and that all human activities, such as agriculture, industry, and social organization, need to be based on these natural principles:

Development needs to be defined in terms of (i) universal accessibility to health-giving food, unpolluted air and water, hygienic clothing and shelter; (ii) enhancement of the resource base while improving the yield; (iii) self-reliance—and optimum realization of the potential—of each locale, region and nation in the perspective of better use of ecological resources; (iv) harmony between the individual, the family, and the society; (v) protection of all plant and animal species in the knowledge that each species, as an expression of life force of Nature, has a full right to existence, and protection of the inanimate environment which provides the niche for, and supports, life; and (vi) nurture of ‘whole, many-sided, evenly-balanced, broad-minded men and women’.³⁸

Elsewhere, Shailendranath Ghosh says that the human–nature relationship and its emphasis on the protection of life have centrally to do with the principles inherent in Sanatana Dharma, according to which man is a part of nature. Men may live in a condition of ecological safety only if they accept that state of nature.³⁹ A proper ecological ethic, it is argued, is the only guarantee of human survival. The natural order of itself provides the basis for recognizing that the protection of nature, culture, and life are inseparable. To this end nature and the natural order should be left alone; human intervention is malign,

³⁸ Shailendranath Ghosh, ‘Development Strategy for a Better Quality of Life’, *Manthan*, vol. xi, no. 5, May 1990, pp. 41–56.

³⁹ Shailendranath Ghosh, ‘Adhunikikaran ka Abhishap: Paryavaran-Vidhwansh’ (The Curse of Modernity: Environmental Destruction), *Manthan*, vol. 18, no. 3, July–September 1997, pp. 49–53.

since nature has its own capacity to heal its wounds and revive its energies. Hindu culture, traditions, and *samskars* imbibed this knowledge in the past² and thus survived and sustained the natural balance over the ages.⁴⁰

So, what happened to cause the disbalance that is modernity? This is where eco-nationalism and eco-naturalism outline the eco-enemy: immigrants, migrants, and minorities are the eco-enemy. Multiculturalism and immigration on the one hand, and environmental destruction on the other, are conjoined as the threat. To counter this threat, a new assertive, confident, patriotism is required, as well as a population free of pollution. Within this logic multicultural society is suspect because it stands in contrast to the ethno-cultural conception of identity. In that sense it violates the natural unity between the people of Bharat and their environs.

Much of the discussion on environmental destruction is also a discussion on migrants. It could be asserted that a vocabulary hostile to migrants and immigrants is the Hindu nationalist's ecological language. They argue for instance that the forests of the Western Ghats, in the Shimoga and Dakshina Kannada districts, have been subject to total destruction by migrant settlers from Kerala. These migrants are Syrian Christians and are seen as those who have by hook or by crook occupied forest and vacant revenue lands. They are seen as using all sorts of pressure—sheer muscle as well as political power—to occupy and retain these lands. In this they are being aided by missionaries: 'The role of a Shimoga-based missionary institution, called Shantiniketan, is said to be glaringly visible in the migration of people from Kerala and their encroaching forest and vacant revenue lands.'⁴¹ The destroyers of the environment are said to get money from foreign

⁴⁰ Vyas, 'Paryavaran Sanrakshan'. He argues that protection of life is the hallmark of Indian culture and this guides our relationship with nature. He explains that nature and the natural order are self-sustaining and ideal for us. Also see Ghosh, 'Development Strategy for a Better Quality of Life'. He says that human survival at the basic level depends on an ecological ethic. This holds true for spiritual as well as material resource management.

⁴¹ H.B. Mallya, 'Rape of the Western Ghats', *Organiser*, 15 February 1987, pp. 8 and 10.

countries, particularly the USA. Their motive is to convert Hindus into Christians. The natives have to be awakened against foreigners:

The Awakening: The local people are slowly realizing the meaning and the dangers of this illegal encroachment and deforestation. They are preparing for a struggle against this threat. The Appiko (just like the Chipko) movement, Vriksha Samrakshini Vedik (Save the Tree Forum), Parisara Samrakshana Vedike, Hindu Jagarana Vedic, etc., are some of the organizations spearheading this people's movement. They have already held meetings, processions and *dharnas* to bring pressure on the state government to bring a halt to this dangerous trend. They have also taken up some positive projects such as 'Vriksha Raksha Andolan' by planting lakhs of saplings to reinforce our vanishing forests. Educating the public is also a part of the movement.⁴²

The *Organiser* also outlines a supposed decline in the Hindu population. Muslims procreate at rates higher than Hindus; apparently this has been a feature of the last forty years. This demographic catastrophe is tantamount to the destruction of natural resources: 'The Muslim fundamentalists who raise a hue and cry for Muslim interests must answer why the community—an integral part of Hindusthan—fails to safeguard the national interest and depletes the nation's resources.'⁴³

Brahminical Models and Cow Protection

Hindu nationalists deploy Hindu religious texts which, they argue, contain insights into nature and environmental sustainability that might be usefully translated into an environmental rhetoric for present-day India. They quote the *Vedas* and the *Dharmasastras* to demonstrate that Bharat and the Hindu religion uphold conservation as central to life systems and processes. Several articles and books advance this

⁴² Ibid., p. 10.

⁴³ Vasudha Saini, 'Hindu Population Going Down', *Organiser*, 20 July 1997, pp. 7 and 19. A cogent rebuttal of the RSS view of declining Hindu numbers vis-à-vis Muslims is available in P.K. Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Twentieth-Century Bengal*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Hindu religion-based approach as a way of addressing India's ecological problems. Passages from the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata* are cited, as are Vedic hymns celebrating earth and water. The *Purusa Sukta*, one of the best-known hymns of the *Rig Veda*, proclaims a continuity between humans and the cosmos, suggesting that the gods, the heavens, and the earth itself arose from the *purusa*. This assertion of relationship carries a message of interconnectedness that can be used to advocate respect for nature and its elements. Many of the later legal books of the Brahminical tradition do in fact stipulate that trees must be protected and that water must not be defiled.⁴⁴ The common sense of these texts is elevated to an environmental ethic emanating from the mouths of Hindu deities. The Vedic approach to the environment is, moreover, seen as coherent, consistent, holistic, and best suited to Indian conditions. A long article titled 'Environment and Vedic Heritage' starts with an exploration of a central idea in Vedic religion, which is nothing but a unity in numerous forms and names.⁴⁵ Diversities are resolved and reconciled through the supervening philosophy and doctrine of Vedic monotheism: 'The symbolism of Fire, Light and Dawn, in the same way as the symbolism of different gods of the Vedic pantheon including Surya, Savitri, Varuna, Mitra and many others, represents and reflects the larger cosmic truth of concordance between inner and outer space and a bridge between the spiritual and the ecological.'⁴⁶ The author then asserts that the Vedic hymn of the earth is unquestionably the oldest environmental invocation in world history, the most sublime, the most evocative. 'The earth is a 'sacred space'; the Vedic vision of the world is filled with the purity of a spiritual environment as well as the sanctity of environmental spirituality and morality. All variety of faiths and communities in India have through the ages, it

⁴⁴ Christopher Key Chapple, 'Towards an Indigenous Indian Environmentalism', in Lance E. Nelson (ed.), *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 20–2.

⁴⁵ L.M. Singhvi, 'Environment and Vedic Heritage', *Manthan*, vol. XIX, no. 3, July–September 1998, pp. 41–6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

is concluded, shared the Vedic value system. To seek logic in this sequence of arguments is, naturally, off the mark, it being an aspect of divine revelation.

Ruling dynasties whose politics was based on Vedic texts are seen to represent the ideal political order, partly because the works of ancient poets and writers of that era reverberate with environmental consciousness. The age of Kalidasa, who flourished in the Gupta era, was a golden age. Its intellectuals had proclaimed their affluent world a prototype of heaven. This found expression in art and architecture, in people's relationship with nature, and in social and religious systems.⁴⁷ Rituals and traditions came into being to ensure the right balance, making the Vedic texts the basis for desirable social prescription. Every Hindu came to perform certain rituals, which could be in the form of worship, daily or occasionally.⁴⁸

Cow protection was very much a part of this rhetoric. The RJA states:

There are two ways to use a cow: to slaughter it and use her beef; or to milk it. Slaughtering destroys, whereas milking sustains. We can slaughter only once, but milking can continue for years. A Hindu, therefore, milks, rather than exploits Nature. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, while expounding his 'Integral Humanism', has said: '(True) civilization will not thrive on exploitation of Nature, but will sustain Nature, and will, in turn, itself be nourished.' Milking, rather than exploitation, should be our aim. The system should be such that the overflow from Nature is used to sustain our lives.⁴⁹

The cow then expands into a potent and sacred symbol of the nation. The bovine as divine comes to be represented as mother to all Hindus as well as to Hindu identity and nationality. Peter van der Veer has shown the links between Hindu nationalism and cow-as-mother. He raises some interesting points, linking Hindu love for the mother

⁴⁷ S.R. Sehgal, 'In Vedic Lore Ten Sons were Equal to One Tree', *Organiser*, 29 June 1986, pp. 9 and 11.

⁴⁸ RJA, *Hindu Sanskriti and Environment*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

cow and the protection of her body to Brahminical rituals, to devotional religion, to the cow as a nurturing mother goddess, and to the usefulness of her products.⁵⁰ Another scholar, Christopher Pinney, highlights how in colonial India locally produced visual images for the masses played a crucial role in the organization as well as the ideology of the cow protection agitation.⁵¹ In these the body of the cow was invested with divinity and she became a proto-nation. This new space of 'cow-nation' embodied a Hindu cosmology, with the sacred inscribed onto her body.⁵²

The BJP considers the cow an effective form of protection against environmental degradation and has made vegetarianism and cow worship a central part of its Hindu nationalist agenda. On the patient back of the cow and its progeny rests the entire structure of Indian agriculture. Their election manifesto promises to amend Article 45 of the constitution to cover bulls and bullocks, to prohibit all trade (state as well as private) involving the slaughter of cows, and to implement a policy of 'Go-Samvardhan, Goshalas, and Pinjarapoles'.⁵³ In its 2009 manifesto, the protection of cows and calves was listed under the classification 'preserving our cultural heritage'.⁵⁴ The cow has to be protected against enemies and the enemies have to be condemned in the name of Gau Mata. The enemies are identified as those who butcher, sell, or eat cows. 'The situation has so greatly deteriorated that on the one hand selfish businessmen are importing large quantities of beef tallow with the connivance of bureaucrats and mixing it with vegetable ghee and thus playing with the sentiments

⁵⁰ van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, pp. 86–9.

⁵¹ Christopher Pinney, 'The Nation (Un)Pictured? Chromolithography and "Popular" Politics in India, 1878–1995', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 23, Summer 1997, pp. 841–7; idem, 'Indian Magical Realism: Notes on Popular Visual Culture', in Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, and Susie Tharu (eds), *Subaltern Studies X*, pp. 221–4, 230–3.

⁵² Pinney, 'The Nation (Un)Pictured?', pp. 841–7.

⁵³ BJP, *Towards Ram Rajya*, pp. 13–14.

⁵⁴ For a recent analysis of this, see Smitha Rao, 'Saffronisation of the Holy Cow: Unearthing Silent Communalism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLVI, no. 15, 9–15 April 2011, pp. 80–7.

and health of the people, while on the other, taking undue advantage of a Supreme Court decision, they are exporting beef by killing healthy bullocks and cows in the name of old and infirm bullocks and cows.⁵⁵ A prominent RSS thinker and social worker asserts that the cow is not only to be evaluated in terms of its manifold uses, but also on the basis of its cultural, religious, and national appeal.⁵⁶



The environmental concerns of Hindu nationalists are sometimes channelled through virtually the language used by radical environmental and social movements. Both speak of natural wealth. But Hindu nationalists argue for the exclusivity of Hindu tradition while lauding traditional agriculture, traditional industries, traditional systems of water management, and other such living technological, social, religious, and cultural traditions. Their priorities are the management of natural resources through participation by local communities with their exclusive initiatives, accountability, and trusteeship. Here the initiative by *gram sabhas* in water management is a first step. Other important features are the decisive role of and control by village

⁵⁵ BJP Pamphlet no. 40, quoted in Ahuja, *BJP and the Indian Politics*, p. 10. Also see, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, *Political Diary*, Bombay, Jaico Publishing House, 1968, p. 153. Here the RSS ideologue emphasizes the socio-economic and environmental importance of cows, saying that there is a strong sentiment for the cow in India which Westerners cannot understand; only Westernized, and therefore denationalized, Indians favour the slaughter of cows. Also see Pramod Kumar, 'Rajasthan Respects the Cow and the Constitution', *Organiser*, 10 September 1995, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Nana Deshmukh, 'Manaviya Sanskriti ke Vikas ke liye Gau-Vans ka Sanrakshan Aavashyak' (Cow Protection is Necessary for the Progress of Human Culture), *Manthan*, vol. 18, no. 1, January–March 1997, pp. 37–41. Various organizations working closely with the RSS repeatedly emphasize the importance of the cow in these terms, and there are a large number of publications on this. For example, see 'Gau Sewa se Sampoorana Kranti' (Total Revolution by Serving the Cow), *Manthan*, vol. 19, no. 4, October–December 1998, unpaginated. Also see Rabindranath, 'Bharatiya Krishi Paddhati mein Gramon ki Bhoomika'; 'Gai, Ram aur Aaj ka Hindu' (Cow, Ram and Today's Hindu), *Divya Alok*, vol. 1, no. 3, April–June 1996, pp. 38–54.

communities in areas like agriculture, forests, water management, and fisheries; fair distribution of land keeping in view the tillage capacity; an emphasis on community management of forest land and revenue land; and the share of the local community in mining and other industries in their areas. They underline the importance of harmonizing Jan, Jal, Jameen, Jangal, and Janvar, with the greatest emphasis being given to agriculture and rural planning. They advocate the need for reviving and strengthening the *pani panchayat* and village traditions of forest management.⁵⁷

The themes around which the views of Hindu nationalists on the environment are organized—eco-nationalism, eco-primitivism, eco-naturalism, eco-enemy, Brahminical models, and cow protection—are not always translated into concrete political solutions to environmental problems. However, that is hardly the point. Among Hindu nationalists, nature is understood as an ontological home through which a collective Hindu identity is defined. Within all the RSS outfits there is a common belief that the pollution of water, air, and environment is inextricably tied to the pollution of Hindu identity: the pollution of external and internal nature thus stems from the same violation of a natural and rooted order. Accordingly, the notion of ‘foreign’ within this discourse denotes not simply an increased number of immigrants/migrants who are destroying land and forests, but rather a nebulous alien presence that disrupts the national unity of Hindus with their specific home in nature.

⁵⁷ SJM, *Rebuilding the Nation*, pp. 12–19.

The Making of an Authority

Anna Hazare and the Watershed Management Programme in Ralegan Siddhi

Anna Hazare's programme of watershed development in Ralegan Siddhi merits attention not only for its environmental impact but also because of its comprehensive and multifaceted nature. It gives us insights into the ways in which an individual and his organization can play a central role in reshaping rural life. In Hazare's case the elusive but crucial element is 'moral authority', which can only be effectively exercised if there is a large degree of consent and conservative or traditional respect for exemplars among those upon whom such authority is sought to be exercised. Surprisingly, accounts of this experiment, largely celebratory in nature, have not examined the ideology and politics which underpin it. I believe it is crucial, in order to understand the likely future of 'green villages', to critically interrogate all that surrounds this brand of environmentalism. Therefore this chapter is focused mainly on understanding precisely how rural developmental and environmental work in the journeys of Anna Hazare and Ralegan Siddhi acquire their legitimacy and authority. In what ways are they fed by, and feed into, some of the dominant political cultures of the state? To what extent are they articulated within a coherent ideological framework? Built on such a framework, does a political theory and its practice open up or expand political conservatism?

Like the ideology and appeal of any other rural organization or movement, those of Anna Hazare's programme are not based on a single plank. Although developmental and environmental works form the core of its ideological structure, the organization includes other issues. At times it provides a variety of activities to its audience, but all these also eventually reinforce its principal ideological framework. An understanding of the ideological DNA of green villagers and their environmentalist fellow-travellers will give us an idea of the core elements of this endeavour and ideology which motivate villagers and environmentalists, as well as the nature of ideological perceptions and preferences among a connected set of people and organizations.

The Historical Context of Maharashtra

Anna Hazare and Ralegan Siddhi are not a new addition to the social history of Maharashtra state. Indeed, the movement has borrowed many features from the historical evolution of the region, especially from the political culture of the state, with which it negotiates at different levels. Many factors are at play, with four being of primary importance: (i) nativism and regionalism in Maharashtrian culture and politics; (ii) the structure and nature of caste and class; (iii) the agrarian environment and the rural economy; and (iv) local environmentalism.

Nativism and Regionalism in Maharashtrian Culture and Politics

In his pioneering work on the Shiv Sena in Mumbai, Dipankar Gupta gives an overview of nativism in the culture and politics of Maharashtra. He shows how the popularity and mass appeal of the Samayukta Maharashtra Samithi (SMS) and Shiv Sena were largely made possible by relying on certain dominant sentiments among Maharashtrians regarding the exclusiveness and superiority of their culture and history.¹

¹ Dipankar Gupta, *Nativism in a Metropolis: The Shiv Sena in Bombay*, Delhi, Manohar, 1982, pp. 40–6.

Gupta says that the Maratha empire, established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, created strong affinities within the population on account of a common language, race, religion, literature, and political existence. The Maratha wars against the Mughals were portrayed as a religious conflict of Hindus against Muslims, idealized as the rivalry between Shivaji and Aurangzeb, strengthening Hindu solidarity by the identification of a common enemy and the quasi-deification of heroic resistance centred in a local ruler. The Maratha empire became not only a bastion of Hinduism—the *Hindu pad padshahi*—but also a kind of last haven for the subjugated indigenous population. In the early twentieth century, initially under the leadership of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and later under Lokmanya Tilak, Maharashtrians tried to reassert themselves in the mainstream of India's national and political life by re-emphasizing the high points of Maharashtrian history in the days of the *Hindu pad padshahi* and by activating pride in their culture and tradition. Tilak revived the Ganpati and Shivaji festivals and also demanded the formation of a unilingual province of Maharashtra. The SMS systematically and successfully tapped these local and regional sentiments by emphasizing the cultural identity of Maharashtrians. Shivaji was especially glorified, soon being transformed into a public god, and Marathi sentiments of linguistic regionalism and parochialism were taken to new heights. Later, a few years after the unilingual state of Maharashtra was formed, there began the rise and growth of the Shiv Sena, especially in Mumbai, riding on the same sentiments and invoking once again the glorious days of Shivaji.

The legend of Shivaji is so deeply rooted in the Maharashtrian psyche that it could be asserted no other figure in Indian history has transcended his or her time to this degree. The Marathas, the ruling caste of Maharashtra, have always prided themselves over their connection with Shivaji, and the official support given by various governments to this legend has only strengthened their pride.² Tilak cultivated and used the Shivaji legend, with a public celebration of

² V.M. Sirsikar, 'Political Culture of Maharashtra', in A.R. Kulkarni and N.K. Wagle (eds), *Region, Nationality and Religion*, Mumbai, Popular Prakashan, 1999, pp. 5–17.

his birthday for the purpose of mobilizing the masses in the freedom struggle.³ As James Laine puts it: 'The nationalist project later appropriated Shivaji, taking his tale of Maratha *swarajya* and making it an anticipation of the independence movement. In stages, Shivaji has become a Vaishnava Varkari, a "Maharashtrian" and finally an Indian, even a secular nationalist one . . . The nationalist must construct a romantic, nostalgic, primordialist discourse which imitates the language of local communities.'⁴

The Shiv Sena and the Hindu nationalists have in the more recent past used the Shivaji legend maximally, with nostalgic references, saffron flags, and of course what they are reputed for, namely militancy. In fact, when the Shiv Sena first came to power in the state in 1995, it was at the Shivaji Park that Manohar Joshi took his oath as chief minister.⁵

Religion has also supplied a strong input within the creation of Maharashtra's cultural identity.⁶ Religious festivals, especially the Ganpati festival, have been the centre around which large public gatherings have been constituted since the 1890s. Ganpati, a syncretic figure, combined elements of high Hinduism, asceticism, and wisdom with the values of village Hinduism, devotion, and pleasure. Ganpati had the potential for a political career since one part of his personality derived from Shiva, the potent warrior. Ganpati was an 'overcomer of obstacles' and thus a useful symbol for a protest movement.⁷ In

³ Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 82, 89–91.

⁴ James W. Laine, 'A Question of Maharashtrian Identity: Hindu Self-definition in the Tales of Shivaji', in Meera Kosambi (ed.), *Intersections: Socio-Cultural Trends in Maharashtra*, Delhi, Orient Longman, 2000, p. 70.

⁵ Vaibhav Purandare, *The Sena Story*, Mumbai, Business Publications, Inc., 1999, pp. 7–8. During poll campaigns the Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray repeatedly announced that if they came to power, the swearing-in ceremony of the Shiv Sena chief minister would not be at the exclusive Raj Bhavan, it would be at Shivaji Park, under the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, with the entire city invited.

⁶ Kosambi, 'Introduction', in Kosambi (ed.), *Intersections*, p. 4.

⁷ Richard Cashman, *The Myth of the Marathas*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, p. 75.

contemporary India this kaleidoscopic event is of interest to various institutions—from political parties to the state, from media conglomerates to community organizations. This has helped the event to become a focal point for community and national identities in the making. Martial representations of Ganpati and the development of shrine tableaux which provide commentaries on issues of broad interest, such as the freedom struggle, political corruption, and the nuclear rivalry with Pakistan, are evidence of their appeal among the populace.⁸

The Structure and Nature of Caste and Class

Historically, western India under Peshwa rule was a relatively closed society in religious terms, especially in comparison with what it was under the East India Company. In pre-nineteenth-century society, upward mobility was relatively easier for individuals and even for entire castes. After the move up, these sanskritizing castes frequently adopted the religious and social practices of the groups above them in the hierarchy. However, change in social status within the larger hierarchy of Hindu society was a difficult issue. The Brahmins remained firmly on the highest rung of the ladder, the Shudras on the last. British rule, instead of breaking down these inequalities, reinforced them by adding to the older religious authority of Brahmins a formidable new range of administrative and political powers.⁹

The nineteenth century also witnessed strong social movements of the lower and middle castes against upper-caste dominance. Gail Omvedt sees this as a more radical cultural revolt in Maharashtra whose basis was the *bahujan samaj*, the non-Brahmin peasant masses, with leadership being provided by certain prominent non-Brahmin intellectuals. The most influential, Jotirao Phule (1827–90), of the *mali* (gardener) caste, formulated an ideology of genuine cultural revolt which called for the abolition of caste and the adoption of a scientific

⁸ Raminder Kaur, *Performative Politics and the Cultures of Hinduism: Public Uses of Religion in Western India*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2003.

⁹ Rosalind O' Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, 1985; rptd Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2010, pp. 4–7.

and rational outlook. Omvedt also observes that in Maharashtra the peasant and the lower- and middle-caste 'masses' have a social reality and a historical tradition of their own, which is in opposition at crucial points to elite tradition (including the tradition of aristocratic non-Brahmins).¹⁰

The present jati pyramid of Maharashtra is composed of Brahmins; elite Marathas claiming Kshatriya ancestry; peasant Marathas (known earlier, and in some parts of Maharashtra even now, as Kunbis); artisan and service jatis (of the Shudra varna); and a number of former 'untouchable' jatis technically outside the varna system, such as Mahars, who are known by the generic term 'Dalits'.¹¹ In a large majority of the state's villages, Marathas are the dominant caste. Villages with other castes in dominant positions exist, but are few in number and normally conform to the requirements of the regional Maratha dominance. In most villages Kunbi Marathas constitute a very substantial portion of the total population, but in any given village only a few Marathas have wealth, power, and rank. The latter two are often the consequence of the first, but were in the past closely linked with the hereditary headmanship (*patilki*).¹² The dominance of the Marathas in the power structure is generally ascribed to their large number in the region. There are various estimates of the Maratha population: the Maratha-Kunbi cluster is reckoned to be about 50 per cent, or about 55 per cent in rural Maharashtra, this representing about 35 per cent of the state's population.¹³ Thus, elite Marathas constitute the rural hegemonic class in Maharashtra. Their hegemony rests on simultaneous control over economy and culture.¹⁴ There has come about a new kind of concentration of wealth and resources

¹⁰ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, Bombay, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976, pp. 7, 120.

¹¹ Kosambi, 'Introduction', p. 3.

¹² Jayant Lele, *Elite Pluralism and Class Rule: Political Development in Maharashtra*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1982, pp. 31–5.

¹³ S.M. Dahiwalé, 'Consolidation of Maratha Dominance in Maharashtra', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 February 1995, p. 336.

¹⁴ Jayant Lele, 'On Class, Caste and Hegemony: Classes in Rural Maharashtra'.

within this hegemonic high Maratha class or people. The so-called 'rabi belt' of foodgrain production and the regions producing cotton and sugarcane have many 'cooperative kings'.¹⁵ These fractions of the hegemonic class have used the policy processes of pluralist democracy with great sophistication and to maximum advantage—even in the context of a generally stagnant economy.¹⁶

Agrarian Environment and Rural Polity

The 'agrarian environment' denotes a field of social negotiations around the environment in predominantly rural contexts. Agrarian affiliations affect the interactions and processes of the actors and issues involved, and, given that India is predominantly agricultural, the agrarian and the environmental are enmeshed and never autonomous. Environmental changes are connected with agrarian structures, and environmental politics is linked with the agrarian world, the locus and object of this politics.¹⁷

So it is partially possible to explain why Maharashtra has a distinct culture of its own on the basis of the principles of cultural ecology: the environment has played a very important role in the making of Maharashtrian culture. The region witnessed a flowering of its culture when the environment was congenial, and the quality of life deteriorated when the conditions were adverse.¹⁸ Other than the plateau-like morphology, the shallow stream valleys, and the semi-arid monsoonal climate, the most significant environmental feature

in N.K. Wagle (ed.), *Images of Maharashtra: A Regional Profile of India*, London, Curzon Press, 1980, p. 84.

¹⁵ D.B. Rosenthal, 'Deurbanization, Elite Displacement and Political Change in India', *Comparative Politics*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1970.

¹⁶ V.M. Dandekar, 'Introduction', in S.H. Deshpande (ed.), *Economy of Maharashtra*, Poona, Samaj Prabodhan Sanstha, 1973.

¹⁷ Arun Agrawal and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds), *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representation, and Rule in India*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 1–21.

¹⁸ M.K. Dhavalikar, 'Maharashtra: Environmental and Historical Process', in Kulkarni and Wagle (eds), *Region, Nationality and Religion*, p. 41.

of the state is its rainfall, the year-to-year variability being very high and droughts fairly common.

For historical reasons the agrarian structure of the state varies significantly across its different regions. As in other states of the country, land reforms and agrarian changes in the state began in two phases. The first phase constituted reform measures in the period before 1965, the second phase being reform measures in the early 1970s. These measures focused on the prevention of fragmentation, the abolition of intermediaries and tenancy reforms, a ceiling on the size of landholdings, and redistribution of land to the landless. But the implementation of these was not only tardy, it also revealed many imperfections.¹⁹ For example, in a detailed study on the distribution of government land to the poor in western Maharashtra, it was found that norms had been violated in the scarcity zone—where 79.31 per cent of the beneficiaries were not Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs); similarly, in the west coastal plains 56.6 per cent of the beneficiaries were not SCs and STs. The districts where such violations were high were Kolhapur, Pune, Ahmadnagar, Sangli, and Thane, where 64 to 100 per cent of the land had been distributed to other castes.²⁰ The uneven regional development, the nexus between agriculture and industry, the emergence of a strong class of rural elites, a history of social movements with an active role played by the peasantry, and social stratification are other important characteristics of the agrarian environment and rural polity.

The cooperatives, local governments, and educational institutions are all part of the rural polity as well. In the post-Independence period the rich Marathas have dominated these. Given their power and position, they act as patrons, extending help in matters pertaining to employment and finance, securing the benefits of government programmes, and providing positions in local bodies. Those who receive

¹⁹ R.S. Deshpande, 'Land Reforms and Agrarian Structure in Maharashtra', in Ghanshyam Shah and D.C. Shah (eds), *Land Reforms in India, Volume 8, Performance and Challenges in Gujarat and Maharashtra*, Delhi, Sage Publications, 2002, pp. 95–126.

²⁰ K. Gopal Iyer, 'Distribution of Government Land in Western India', in Shah and Shah (eds), *Land Reforms in India, Volume 8*, pp. 220–44.

help obviously feel obliged to these elites and become subservient to their leaders.²¹

Local Environmentalism

Environmental issues are inextricable from local, social, and developmental problems. A village constructing its own little dam or a region struggling to reclaim wasteland are focusing on environmental issues while simultaneously engaging with local developmental issues. There has in fact been no such thing as a single perspective, or a single movement, in relation to the environment. Given the range of environments and diversity of people, there has been a corresponding multitude of issues and perspectives as well as organizational initiatives in relation to the environment. Since the 1970s, particularly, organizations, campaigns, and movements have constantly appeared in remote areas, addressing specific local environmental issues. Each movement picks up a specific problem, such as stopping or building a particular dam, or claiming rights over land in forests, or fish in the seas. Each initiative chooses its own strategy, depending upon the nature of the main issue, the socio-cultural life of the people, and the character of the local organization. In the process, some inspiring and persuasive leaders have emerged. Many have contributed considerably to the creation of greater environmental sensitivity. Numerous NGOs have also made their presence felt through issue-based campaigns and constructive activity. And several environmental movements have sought to associate themselves more closely with these NGOs.²²

From the perspective of institutionalized social action, the early 1970s—the student movements, the movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, and the state repression during the ‘Emergency’ (1975–7)—form the springboard for a wide spectrum of social action initiatives. An unprecedented range of institutionalization processes happened from 1975 to 1995, impacting voluntary social action initiatives which

²¹ Dahiwalé, ‘Consolidation of Maratha Dominance’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 336–42.

²² Mukul Sharma, *Landscapes and Lives: Environmental Dispatches on Rural India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 1–7.

were influenced by new trends in international politics as well as the revitalized accent on the 'development' of the third world. These institutional and ideological contours were also influenced by the emergence of international human rights and development organizations, and secularized groups of church and sponsorship organizations.²³ Given the inefficiency of the state to address increasing deprivation, as well as the techno-economic approach adopted by the ruling elite, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of localized social action by the subaltern masses and smaller identity-based assertions for entitlements and rights within the structures of state and society.

Maharashtra too has a history of such social movements, with the rural population playing an active role. From the awakening among the rural peasantry initiated by Jotiba Phule through the Satya Shodhak Samaj, to present-day initiatives and movements by labourers, tribals, women, and Dalits, a good base was built here for social action. From Phule to Ambedkar to Baba Amte, from the protection of sacred groves in village Gani of Shrivardhan taluk to the building of the Baliraja dam in Tandulwadi village of Sangli district, there has been much local environmentalism in Maharashtra.²⁴ It is in this context and the specific agrarian-environmental history of the region that the movement of Anna Hazare needs to be seen.

Ralegan Siddhi and Anna Hazare: A Profile

Ralegan Siddhi and its greatly admired leader Anna Hazare have been described thus by two prominent environmentalists, Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain:

In our class-ridden society, who cares for an ex-army jeep driver? And yet Kishan Baburao Hazare, now so fondly called Anna Hazare, has emerged as one of India's leading environmental warriors. His stewardship of Ralegan Siddhi, a village in Ahmadnagar district, has turned

²³ John Samuel, 'Changing Contours of Social Action', in John Samuel (ed.), *Social Action: An Indian Panorama*, Delhi, Vani, 2000, pp. 7–8.

²⁴ Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*, Delhi, Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 57, 91.

it into an environmental model. Every slope is afforested and every *nullah* bunded. The result is a green village far more capable of dealing with the area's recurrent droughts than its neighbours. A lot of money for the 'environmental works' has come from the government's rural development schemes, except that Ralegan Siddhi has set its own priorities and made honest use of government money.²⁵

Another study says: 'It is not investment alone or the faithful implementation of government programmes that has made Ralegan an outstanding phenomenon. Social development towards an ethical and egalitarian society has preceded as well as accompanied economic development in Ralegan, giving it a special place on the development scene.'²⁶

Anna Hazare has his own account of his achievements:

From my personal experience, I can say that any selfless work done conscientiously gets its own publicity. I was given the 'Friend of the Trees' award at the hands of late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1989 without approaching anybody or lobbying for it. Same was the case for Padmashree and Padmabhushan awards given by Rashtrapatiji, and other awards such as Krishi Bhushan, Vasantrao Naik award, Swami Vivekananda Sewa Award . . . The Central Government has coopted me as adviser in four committees without our making any

²⁵ Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, 'Preface', in Usha Rai, Mukul, Sarosh Bana, and Dinesh Kumar, *Call of the Commons: People vs Corruption*, Delhi, Centre for Science and Environment, 1991, p. 3.

²⁶ Ramesh Awasthi, 'Rural Development through People's Mobilisation: A Case Study of Ralegan Siddhi', in M.L. Dantwala, Harsh Sethi, and Pravin Visaria (eds), *Social Change through Voluntary Action*, Delhi, Sage Publications, 1998, p. 74. Also see Vasudha Lokur, *Ralegan Siddhi: Rural Transformation through People's Participation*, Delhi, Capart, n.d., which concludes that Ralegan Siddhi has shown that development is possible even while conserving natural resources; Aruna Bagchee and Sandeep Bagchee, 'Improving Rainfed Farming Systems through Watershed Development: A Case Study of Ralegan Siddhi', Paper presented at the *Asian Farming Systems Symposium*, Bangkok, 19–22 November 1990; Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity*, p. 104; Richard Mahapatra, 'Prosperity and Beyond', *Down To Earth*, vol. 9, no. 10, 15 October 2000, pp. 45–7.

effort. The state government has also requested me to work on their committees on Water Conservation, Dry Land Development, Integration, Model Village Scheme, etc.²⁷

Today Ralegan Siddhi village looks fresh and green in a district that is hilly, dry, and dusty.²⁸ Ahmadnagar district is situated partly in the upper Godavari basin and partly in the Bhima basin. With a total area of 17,035 sq. km, it has 776,787 households and a population of 40,40,642, out of which the rural population is 32,36,945. The SC and ST populations are 484,685 and 3,03,255, respectively.²⁹ Barring the district of Chanda in the Vidarbha region, Ahmadnagar is the largest district of this area of the state, occupying a somewhat central position in Maharashtra. Climatically, most of the district, barring the westernmost Akola *taluka* in the hilly region, receives a rainfall of 500–600 cm, but this cannot be relied upon, and so practically the whole district falls within a chronic scarcity zone in which acute shortages of food and fodder recur once every three to eight years. The climate of the district reveals hot summers, and general dryness much of the year. A glance at the advanced network of State Transport (ST) roads lining sugar factories surrounded by sugarcane, oil mills, engines, pumps, ginning factories, and textile centres gives an idea of the changing profile of the district.³⁰

Ralegan Siddhi has a population of 2317 and comprises 434 households. The SC and ST populations are 171 and 32 respectively.³¹ The caste composition of the village has always been even: except for 46 SC families, the rest are Marathas. The total geographical area of

²⁷ Anna Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi: A Veritable Transformation*, Ahmadnagar, Ralegan Siddhi Pariwar Prakashan, 1997, p. 153.

²⁸ I visited Ralegan Siddhi thrice: in February 1991, July 1995, and October 1999. Most of these accounts are based on my meetings and interviews during these visits. Almost all the literature and writings available on Ralegan Siddhi and Anna Hazare give detailed information on its past and present achievements.

²⁹ Primary Census Abstract 9, *Census of India 2001*, Office of the Registrar General, Delhi.

³⁰ Ahmadnagar District (Revised Edition), *Maharashtra State Gazetteers, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1976*.

³¹ Primary Census Abstract 9, *Census of India 2001*.

the village is 982.31 hectares. Landholdings are unevenly distributed. Of the 638.94 hectares of agricultural land, only 30 families have more than 4 hectares, 62 families have between 2 and 4 hectares, and the rest are either landless or have at most 1 or 2 hectares.³² The lack of irrigation water and the low level of agricultural productivity affects everyone more or less equally. Although there are a few wells, they irrigate no more than a few hectares. With the support of working and retired jawans from the army, as well as some government employees, the village had over the years managed to survive, but only just. Its people were living on the edge, many having had to migrate for wage labour at regular intervals, especially during droughts, like the terrible one of the early 1970s which devastated the entire region. Though the village saw some government relief programmes at the time, they were poorly conceived and badly implemented. For example, the villagers say, a percolation tank was planned for the village. After many years, when it was finally constructed in 1983, it could not work because the water seeped away from the bunds.

So, under the leadership of Anna Hazare the village tried to evolve and implement a different path of watershed development. Villagers constructed storage ponds and reservoirs and *nala* bunds in a series, along the 30-to-45-metre-high hills surrounding the village. Nala bunds were of different kinds—big and small, open and underground—and extensive plantation was carved out in the spaces in between. Soon the hills and the nearby areas were all covered with bunds, trenches, nalas, and plants. Overall, 31 nala bunds were created, with a storage capacity estimated at 2,82,182 cubic metres, covering an area of 605 hectares. Four lakh trees have been planted. Significantly, most of this work has been carried out by utilizing financial resources accruing to the village under the soil conservation and social forestry programmes of the government.

‘Water should not be seen on the surface, it should be caught hold of and kept below’: this was the guiding principle, in the words of Anna.³³ This variety of water conservation led to many positive

³² Based on figures given by *gram sevak* K.N. Bhagat in Ralegan Siddhi in October 1999.

³³ Interview with Anna Hazare in Ralegan Siddhi, 5 February 1991.

developments within a few years. Agricultural land increased, and so did the yield, and the groundwater level, which was 100 feet down, came up to 40–50 feet. Wells and ponds too filled up and now the village is never without water, not even in a year with no rain. Anna's success has led him to experiment with water and land in many ways: 53 small farmers with land adjacent to each other were made to join hands and dig 11 wells. They own these wells jointly, and their waters irrigate more than 100 acres of their land. In another instance, 103 farmers were convinced to form a cooperative. As they pooled their resources and produce, their input costs were reduced. Defunct percolation tanks in the village were repaired using the voluntary labour of villagers. Above all, the distribution of water among the villagers was regulated: unless all the farmers got a first round of irrigation, nobody was entitled to a second round. Those who used water for irrigation compensated, in cash or kind, the landless families that did not use irrigation water. And those who dug individual wells had to share its water with their neighbours.

Shramshakti dwara Gramin Vikas (Rural Development through Labour) has been Anna Hazare's slogan all these years. This is now being appropriated by the state government to design a rural development programme for the entire state. In practice, the slogan meant that within any development work programme at least two members (12 to 58 years of age) from each family in the village had to do *shramdaan* (voluntary labour) for one day, once a month. If this was not possible, they had to give a day's salary to the project fund. At least fifty labourers from the village where the programme was being implemented had to guarantee to work in the project. The development work had to include forest farming, digging wells, and the construction of percolation tanks or bunds. No village could adopt any such programme without a two-thirds majority in the gram sabha, and with the assurance that tree-felling and free-grazing cattle would be banned in and around the village.

In the village there were also several efforts woven around the concept of *daan*, i.e. offering, by the villagers themselves. The school and its attached hostel building had become possible largely through such efforts. About 450 children study here till class 10, and 135 of them live in the hostel. Dropouts and rejected children were given

preference during admissions, and those admitted included boys from Mumbai, Pune, and nearby areas. Students had to offer shramdan as part of their daily curriculum. Headmaster Thakaram Rauat spoke in detail of how the children did the cleaning up of some portion of the village for half an hour every morning. They cleaned the school latrines, and once every week the public toilets of the village. During the rains they were engaged in plantation work for days together. *Daan* also led to a 'grain bank' in the village. When the village improved its agricultural output, most of the farmers' families, under Anna's instructions, began contributing a share of their harvest on a regular basis, and thus the grain bank came into existence. This bank was full now: in 1989–90 it even sold 100 bags of grain in the open market, the earnings from which went to the school. However, the main purpose of the bank was to provide minimum food security to needy families in the drought-prone and dry region. Those in need could get a grain loan from the bank, and in the subsequent year they had to repay the loan along with interest in the form of 10 per cent more grain.

Mobilizing the villagers was an important element in Anna's strategy. He encouraged the active participation of people in the planning and decision-making processes of various programmes, so that 'the village is built through the creative, productive, and innovative hard work of people themselves.' There were 14 *vividh karyakari* societies in the village, dealing with forestry, water, cooperative, school, etc. Women ruled the village panchayat, so much so that all nine of its members were women. They ensured the payment of equal wages to women labourers in the village and propagated the idea of educating the village's girls. Santa Bai Maghari, *sarpanch* of the panchayat, spoke with confidence of how they were elected unopposed, according to the wishes of Anna, for he wanted women to contribute significantly to the village's development.

The face of Ralegan Siddhi has changed in many ways. The village, which had a per capita income of Rs 252 in 1976, now claims this has risen to Rs 2000. H.V. Huprikar, branch manager, Bank of Maharashtra, based in the village, says: 'The village has some money now and the people are conscious of savings. The total savings with this

branch of the bank is Rs 42 lakh, of which Rs 23 lakh is that of the village. Even school students have accounts under the 'minty' scheme and have deposits of nearly Rs 18,000. The recovery of crop loans in the village is about 80 per cent.³⁴

The villagers have also shown an ability to learn things and manage a series of projects, artefacts, and technologies. They have successfully grafted the drip irrigation system, solar panels, and *gobar*-gas plants. Drip irrigation now covers 93 acres in the village. There are 2 bio-gas and 32 *gobar*-gas plants. Streetlights with solar fittings are being managed by the locals and supplemented, if necessary, with services from agencies outside the village.

The Meaning of Anna Hazare

A middle-aged bachelor clad in khadi, Anna Hazare lives in the village mandir, which he renovated out of his savings, after retiring from the army. 'God is not in the temple and is realized through work. But the people gather at the temple, to create oneness in their task',³⁵ he explains. Anna Hazare is widely acknowledged to be public-spirited, honest, simple in his lifestyle, and self-sacrificing for the good of the community. He holds absolute power and his wish is the village's command. His power seems all-encompassing and has emerged from a long and dynamic process of interaction with his village, activists, bureaucracy, and the government. This process is characterized by projections and counter-projections of religion, culture, and tradition; by contestations of what it means to live; and by the deployment of natural and human resources, including persuasion, coercion, and, possibly, suppression.

Anna Hazare looks quite unassuming. However, among the men and women, young and old, of his village, he is seen as a man endowed with intrinsic personal qualities and exceptional powers. As he walks through the lanes of the village, women and children often come to touch his feet. All these years, he has lived with this image and this alone seems to suffice as the basis of his authority. He says, 'If

³⁴ Interview with H.V. Huprikar in Ralegan Siddhi, 7 February 1991.

³⁵ Interview with Anna Hazare.

people are convinced that you are selfless and sacrificing, they are on your side.'³⁶

A Belief System

The basis for Anna's authority comes from a belief system wherein followers consider it their natural and bounden duty to obey the person exercising authority, who in turn thinks it is his natural and bounden right to rule. Thus, believing in authority and acknowledging it become crucial elements in the lives of such people. They justify their belief as rational, ultimate, and absolute. The people follow the order or structure of authority on a more stable and durable basis. Ganpat Pidi Aauti, village *sarpanch* for four years, says: 'Whatever Anna says, we do. The whole village follows his words. Anna's orders work like in the army. We all obey his orders.'³⁷ For another villager, Lakshman Pathare, 'Annajee is like God. Whatever work he will assign, I will fulfil and will never say no. Wherever he will direct, I will go. Annajee has become my nature, my habit. He is my heart.'³⁸ Pathare Bala Saheb Ganpat, a young shopkeeper and secretary of Tarun Mandal, an organization of young boys in the village, explains:

When Annajee was jailed a few years ago, all the villagers went from Ralegan Siddhi to Nimani, Pune, on foot. This is called *dindi yatra*. Here, people go for *dindi yatra* for their God. We consider Annajee a god, which is why we thought it appropriate to organize a programme like this. We celebrate 15 June as the village's birthday, since it is Anna's birthday. There is a three-day festival on that occasion. We are ready to do everything he wants. If he asks me to climb to the top of a mountain and jump into a ditch, I will do it without hesitation. Annajee can say no wrong; he can do no wrong.'³⁹

There is thus recognition of an absolute authority locally, in several internalized ways.⁴⁰ In a village such authority stands for the shared

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Interview with Ganpat Pidi Aauti in Ralegan Siddhi, 7 October 1999.

³⁸ Interview with Lakshman Pathare in Ralegan Siddhi, 9 October 1999.

³⁹ Interview with Pathare Bala Saheb Ganpat in Ralegan Siddhi, 9 October 1999.

⁴⁰ During my two periods of intensive fieldwork in Ralegan Siddhi, in 1991

ground of values, means, and ends that constitute an ideology, and of the system it intends to implement and achieve. These then become the structures of local governance; based on wide consensus, they can also work as normative regulations for the local society. The moral values that are internalized have a great bearing on the goals to be achieved and the means to be applied. In the case of Ralegan Siddhi they work through a central figure who strives for social unity. The common means and values are not given, they are created by the central figure. At specific moments, whenever the need arises, such a person (or a group) can also deploy environmental issues to evolve a common consensus. An environmental issue, by its sheer intensity and appeal, can become hegemonic in giving the social, political, moral, and intellectual leadership a concrete shape, create ideological unity.

Until 1975 Ralegan Siddhi was marked by poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, recurring drought, and environmental degradation. There was hardly 1 acre of irrigated land per family. The yield per acre was 3 to 4 quintals. Since poor water-harvesting techniques were used, the run-off carried away valuable topsoil. As a result, agricultural production could not sustain the population the whole year. Men migrated to the cities to look for jobs or worked on government employment-guarantee schemes. Their income being inadequate, villagers borrowed money from moneylenders. Family life was unstable. Children and youth lacked access to education. There was a high dropout rate and girls did not attend high school. Conflict had become a feature of every activity in the village; theft was common.⁴¹ In this scenario, rural development work through the watershed management programme—constructing bunds of various types to catch and store rain water and thus ensure irrigation—was intended to be a unifying issue that would subside and mix the contending and conflicting elements into a common will. The Adarsh Gaon Yojana is an attempt 'to motivate villagers in the selected *adarsh* [ideal]

and 1999, I gathered many similar accounts from different sets of people in the village.

⁴¹ Lokur, *Ralegan Siddhi*, pp. 3–4.

villages to integrate into their lives the principles of conservation', remarks Anna.⁴²

To forge such a common will, an encompassing concept of unity becomes a crucial factor in an environmental organization. There are many ways and expressions for the need to create such unity—it could be done either through the logic of change or through coercion. According to Anna, rural development must become a powerful instrument of national regeneration, and for this villagers have to work together with the firm conviction that 'Our Village is One Family'. Whatever affects one family affects the whole village, and hence all must put their shoulder to the wheel of securing the welfare of the whole community.⁴³ 'Unity' becomes common to all interest groups and can substitute all other political institutions. Thus, in most of the villages under the programme, for the first time in years the sarpanch has been nominated through consensus. This is considered a significant step towards removing conflicts within the village and unifying it for development.⁴⁴

History and culture become reference points in the search for the common ground of means and values. A glorified mystic past can be a powerful tool to lay the grounds for norms acceptable in the present: an environmental organization or an authority constructs a past to fulfil present needs. Cultural symbols, as given, accepted, and consensual, derive their strength not only from being a part of the dominant value system but also because of their consonance with the contemporary body politic. The mystic past, the constructed culture, and the continuing present coalesce in shaping events beyond or outside the environmental domain too. Anna declares:

In olden days, our country had a lot of wealth. We had a great civilization. Our people were strong. Our villages were places of mutual love, affinity, and closeness. There was a lot of community work, as the people used to build the temple, the school, and the tank together

⁴² Anna Hazare, Ganesh Pangare, and Vasudha Lokur, *Adarsh Gaon Yojana: Government Participation in a People's Programme*, Pune, Hind Swaraj Trust, 1996, pp. 18–19.

⁴³ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 48.

⁴⁴ Hazare, Pangare, and Lokur, *Adarsh Gaon Yojana*, p. 71.

with their own resources. Our mythology refers to 33 crore gods. They were actually 33 crore people, with godly thinking and behaviour. Cow's milk was the main nutrient for growth at that time and this is why the cow was called the mother of 33 crore gods. Now we have lost our national culture, pride, and spirit.⁴⁵

Symbols of the past are referred to functionally:

Great man that he was, Chhatrapati Shivaji could have easily led a luxurious life if he had accepted being a Sardar of the Mughal kings. But he sacrificed it for the uplift and welfare of ordinary people. Today again the social and economic conditions of the common man are worsening and people are looking forward to a self-sacrificing leader like Shivaji Maharaja who will set things right.⁴⁶

He adds: 'Our history and culture is full of great women and great mothers. The great mothers have given birth to great sons like Chhatrapati Shivaji and Swami Vivekananda. Chhatrapati Shivaji's mother Jeejabai and her daughter-in-law Tararani and Rani of Jhansi are examples for present-day daughters to emulate.'⁴⁷

Force and Punishment

In the process of social transformation, Anna believes, advice, persuasion, and good counsel sometimes do not work, and then one has to apply force. The fear of physical force works. However, fear cannot be used permanently, it has to be replaced by a more durable moral force. Anna says that a social worker is like a mother: no one questions the right of a mother to slap her children when they make mistakes for she nurses them too. Children recognize and accept this. Similarly, because a social worker cares for the community and selflessly works for its uplift, he can also occasionally use force. The community accepts his other roles, so it also accepts punishment from him.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Interview with Anna Hazare in Ralegan Siddhi, 9–10 October 1999.

⁴⁶ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 40. This links to the earlier part of my chapter where I highlight the significance of Shivaji in the political and cultural milieu of Maharashtra.

⁴⁷ Interview with Anna Hazare.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

An environmental authority has to use force to implement its own laws, to make others trust it, and to strengthen that trust. Force can be applied in many forms, physical and social, and often just the simple persistent fear of its application suffices to regulate society. Force gives a firm grounding to socially accepted values and means, in the sense that those who dare to violate rules have to be punished. Continuous use of force is justified on the grounds that it serves a socially desirable goal and a collective will. The need for the use of force is also internalized by a large number of people, not only because it is seen as not targeting them but also because they start believing in its worth. Force becomes target-oriented, it has a goal; it becomes an integral part of an environmentally sound and socially harmonious society. Anna says:

Continuous use of force and punishment can work as a double-edged weapon. It can also de-legitimize authority. Hence, the relationship between force, fear, and punishment on the one hand, and individual freedom and democracy on the other, needs to be addressed. But here also the prime concern remains the regulation of society. There are concerns about safeguarding individual freedoms available in a democratic system while attempting such transformation. But this concern should not mean unrestricted license as such interpretation leads to events detrimental to the interests of society and the country. There is no doubt that if misuse of personal freedom is affecting the personal freedom of others and the peace and happiness of society, it would obviously be necessary to curb such personal freedom by force as and when required. Where the persuasion of a social worker or the fear of law fail to change the thinking of society, it is necessary to employ the more effective resource of moral force of the community as a whole. Rather than physical force, the fear of being ostracized by the community is more potent. There is no ambiguity—the use of such force need not be constructed as denial or violation of personal freedom.⁴⁹

When Anna Hazare started his work in Ralegan Siddhi, alcoholism was a serious problem among the villagers, there being a number of

⁴⁹ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, pp. 102–3.

liquor brewing units in the village. Alongside the watershed management programme, Anna decided to first tackle alcoholism. In a meeting called by him in the village temple, it was resolved that liquor dens be closed down and alcohol be altogether banned from the village. Consequently, many brewing units voluntarily closed down after this resolve. The closure of liquor brewing units reduced alcoholism, but some villagers continued to drink. So it was decided that violators would be physically punished. Many were tied to a pole in front of the village temple and flogged. Anna believes that though flogging does not always work, it cannot be called punishment.

It is Anna who proposes flogging and fear as essential parts of a green village, but this belief seems attractive to a wide audience. Even as the authority gives legitimacy to such use of force, fear makes room for itself in the social ethos and is even put on a high pedestal. It is said: 'Social consciousness against drinking has been raised to such

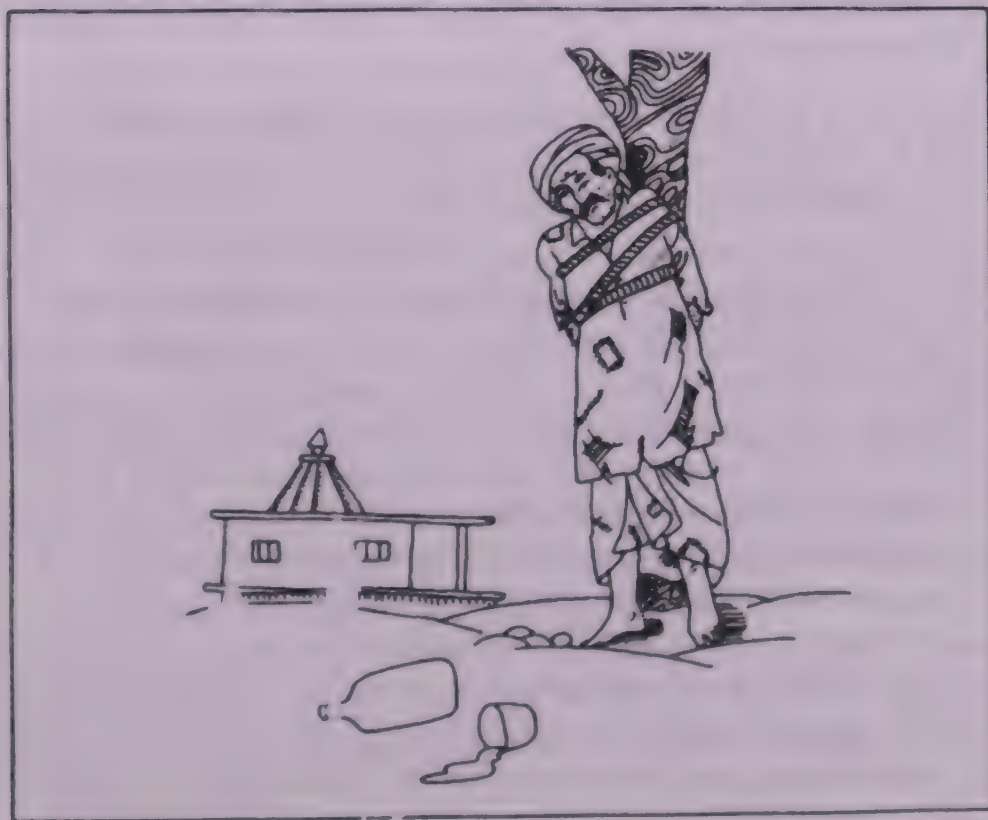


Fig. 3.1: The Need for Fear

Source: Anna Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi: A Veritable Transformation*, p. 93

an extent that a drunken person can be brought to the centre of the village and thrashed, and no one will object.'⁵⁰ Flogging and fear become a part of everyday life and belief. Not only does the authority employing it have the sanction to use it, it becomes legitimate for others to deploy it as well. Pathare Bala Saheb Ganpat's account gives an idea of this:

Earlier there were liquor brewing units in the village. They are all closed now. Annajee gives punishment to those who take liquor. The person is tied to the pole and flogged overnight. The gram sabha has decided to form a group of twenty-five youths of the village who can also give this punishment to drunkards. Once, some people from the neighbouring village entered this village in a drunken state, saying that it was their right, it was democracy. However, the youths of the village caught hold of them and thrashed them thoroughly. Only last year, two or three villagers were caught in a drunken state. Annajee and the youths gave them the standard punishment and then handed them over to the police.⁵¹

The use of punishment gained expression within the ambit of law and the village's elected representatives. The vice-sarpanch of the village, Kailash Pote, says, 'I was drinking. I was also tied to the pole and flogged two or three times. It is normal. Annajee will try to make you understand once or twice and, thereafter he will beat you badly.'⁵² The need for fear and punishment in the social organization is pervasive. No matter what the context—public or private, social or personal—the use of force is believed to be a requirement. Anna states:

Mere existence of a family planning law does not help; its rigid implementation is warranted. This law should be made applicable to all persons living in India, irrespective of caste or creed and if necessary by force . . . At least now political leaders of all parties should realize that 'the party is above the individual but the country's interests should have greater priority over the interests of the party.' They should unanimously pass a law permitting force for population control. We

⁵⁰ Rai, Mukul, Bana, and Kumar, *Call of the Commons*, p. 14.

⁵¹ Interview with Pathare Bala Saheb Ganpat.

⁵² Interview with Kailash Pote in Ralegan Siddhi, 8 October 1999.

have had the practical experience of need of force while implementing family planning measures in Ralegan Siddhi and hence this conclusion!⁵³

Religion and Religious Symbols

Religion and religious symbols are potent resources for the legitimization of a particular regime and authority. They can be used to define and shape a community politically, and adherence to a particular regime and system of laws can be ensured through them. In a so-called environmentally sound or 'ideal' village, religion becomes the vehicle for a concept of transformation and imposition. Its embodiment in a certain place and people emphasizes claims to the legitimacy of that place, people, and ideology. The command-obedience relationship also gets its rationale from the belief that a specific god or temple is supreme and any decision in their precincts must be obeyed. It thus becomes a sacred duty to follow rules, to fulfil the conditions necessary for the village to remain ideal. The ideal village in this sense originates or emanates from the temple and its god, or the power of these crystallized in a prophet figure such as Anna. Not to comply with his commandments is a vice, akin to an offence committed against the divine.

It was important for Anna Hazare to begin village development work along with the rebuilding of the temple which has all along been at the centre of his activities. A sense of unity and collective identity had to be achieved, and the renovation of an old and dilapidated temple out of savings from his provident fund and gratuity proved symbolically the most effective and best way to achieve it. Anna believes the rebuilding of the temple gave people an emotional unity, a sense of oneness, an awareness of their identity, and of an inner self interfacing with God. The village temple slowly turned into a place of village meetings, weddings, and other religious ceremonies, strengthening community and family feeling. A temple has an atmosphere of purity and sanctity. Decisions taken in a temple are believed to have the sanction of God and people are more likely

⁵³ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, pp. 76–7.

to follow them, such decisions being tantamount to religious commitments.⁵⁴

This begs the question: What is Anna's notion of religious commitment? Anna Hazare desires in himself a combination of many aspects of religion: 'spirituality', or 'humanity is the core of each religion'. And 'just as we have the concept of God within the four walls of a temple, we have to enlarge this concept to perceive our village and the country as a large temple and the inhabitants therein as almighty Gods. We must worship them as we worship God.' He asks: 'what is the use of undertaking a pilgrimage if the people in our house or around us are hungry and full of sorrow?'⁵⁵

One aspect of his religious discourse is the insistence that God is within the reach of human beings. Anna's god is not only 'supreme, a 'superpower' and 'creator', but also a selection of earthly gods who can be called, roused, and appropriated for the needs of a village or country. According to him, Lord Rama set an example before every citizen of how to conduct everyday life. He demonstrated ideal love for parents, brothers, wife, and community. He also showed how a king, by his every thought and action, ought to look after the welfare of his subjects. But even in his time there were insolent barbarians like Ravana, as well as people like the indolent washerman who dared to doubt the chastity of Sitamai (who had been held captive by Ravana).⁵⁶ This familiarity and accessibility make it possible for Anna to call for reincarnation—a call by a legitimate authority for a familiar, earthy god: 'There is need for Lord Shri Krishna to reincarnate and save the country, in the form of united strength of intellectuals of good character active in social work, economic endeavour, religious guidance, and politics.'⁵⁷

Rules and Codes

Rules govern the entire social, political, and environmental life of the village, and strict adherence to these by the people make for an ideal

⁵⁴ Interview with Anna Hazare.

⁵⁵ All expressions used by Anna Hazare in the interview.

⁵⁶ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 43.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

village. These clearly defined rules and their neat execution in many spheres also contribute substantially to the creation of common means and values. It is these rules that make an authority-figure and his regime universally acceptable and recognizable. In this scenario, those who make the rules and faithfully obey them are deemed legitimate, while those who do not are rendered illegitimate and illegal. The rules are all-encompassing and exercised in the broadest possible way. This is best ensured if the rules and their adherence operate in an atmosphere of traditional patron–client relations. However, even when some of the rules are specified in a collective process and have a sound and sustainable environmental rationale, the language of their justification, or the manner of their implementation, often make them dubious.

As a social and environmental worker, Anna Hazare has been concerned with rules and norms that he considers benchmarks for an activist: 'A social worker encounters people of different sexes, ages and groups. In all situations, he has to be very careful about the social norms and the rules. His work can go haywire if his mind and heart get shaky, and he is not disciplined about the rules. One has to have a very firm control on oneself.'⁵⁸ This concern finds yet another expression: 'It is very important that those who lead the society or the movement should possess a clean character and personality. They should also have clean ideas and clean living.'⁵⁹ Anna covers much ground—from prescribing rules for a social worker to suggesting them in the context of village development work. He has a definite model for rules:

The daily routine enforced in the army such as getting up early in the morning, the jogging and the physical training thereafter, the cleanliness of body, clothing, living quarters and the neighbourhood, etc., led to development of a disciplined life, benefits of which I am availing of even today. The habit of giving due respect and regard to seniors by age, post or competence was inculcated in us. The meticulous attention to small details such as closed up and unbroken buttons on shirts, loose shoe-laces, etc., and the system of first obeying the order

⁵⁸ Interview with Anna Hazare.

⁵⁹ Interview of Anna Hazare by journalist Rajesh Kumar, 25 October 1999.

and then pointing out mistakes or irregularities, if any, in the orders taught us many good habits. This has helped me in conducting the village development work at Ralegan Siddhi according to the rules and regulations decided by us by common consent.⁶⁰

Others often exactly translate this language. A villager, H.Y. Mapari, who used to be in the army and whose three sons are now employed there, says, 'This village works like an army. As a commandant, Anna orders and we all follow him.'⁶¹ Similarly, 43-year-old Lakshman Pathare says, 'I am an army man and my ideology is the same as Annajee's. Army discipline is the ideal. Obedience is your habit there—never say no, never decline what your seniors ask you to do.'⁶²

Five universal rules have evolved out of the developmental experiences in Ralegan Siddhi. They are *nasbandi* (restriction in family size), *nashabandi* (ban on alcohol), *charaibandi* (ban on free grazing), *kurhabandi* (ban on tree felling), and *shramdan* (donation of voluntary labour for community welfare). It is mandatory for the villagers to take an oath to follow these rules. Through these rules alone is the integrated watershed development programme implemented in the village. There are many other such rules. For instance, if the farmers desire to keep their lands alive and useful, they must imbibe the message, 'Do not use chemical fertilizers. Do not become killers of your own land. Use natural fertilizers. Protect Mother Earth.'⁶³ Because it requires large quantities of water, the cultivation of sugarcane is banned in the village. According to a researcher, Madhukar Karr, 'Anna is against sugarcane cultivation for a different reason as well. He says that the sugarcane farmers keep sitting idle. They do not work, and get involved in petty politics.'⁶⁴

A high level of adherence to many 'dos' and 'don'ts', both in public and private life, is central to the path of rural development in Ralegan Siddhi. Here, no shop can sell bidis or cigarettes. Film songs and

⁶⁰ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 114.

⁶¹ Interview with H. Y. Mapari in Ralegan Siddhi, 7 October 1999.

⁶² Interview with Lakshman Pathare.

⁶³ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 99.

⁶⁴ Interview with Madhukar Karr in Ralegan Siddhi, 7 February 1991.

movies are not allowed. Only religious films, like *Sant Tukaram*, *Sant Gyaneshwar*, etc., may be screened. Only religious songs are allowed via loudspeakers² at the time of marriages. According to Kailash Pote: 'Last year a villager, who is a Mahar by caste and a driver by profession, got a dish antenna installed in his house and started watching cable TV. He also asked his neighbours if they would be willing to get cable connections. Anna scolded him severely and he had to apologize.'⁶⁵

Acquiescence is the keyword, assent compulsory. The regime is martial, its nearest prototype being the ancient Greek city republic of Sparta, fabled for the discipline which won it battles against forces far greater than its own. As in all such regimented arenas, in Ralegan Siddhi the fear of punishment has gradually given way to willing acceptance. The external manifestations of acceptance are dissolved by the adherent's internal belief. Such acquiescence is a kind of quietism as well, for it entails the acceptance of not simply authority but authoritarian rule, of one person's right to formulate orders and of one's unquestioning duty to follow those orders. The environmental regime in Ralegan Siddhi thrives and develops on this acceptance. It is not only crucial to the existence of the regime and its wider recognition, it is actually the basis for the creation of a set of values and means that legitimize authority. In the village it is often emphasized that the villagers themselves decide not to sell bidis and cigarettes in their shops, that they themselves do not watch films and listen to film songs. Authority has reached a kind of Hegemonic Absolute here, for coercion is no longer perceived to be coercion. Instead, it is perceived as personal desire.

This hegemonic process of acquiescence and its vocabulary are deeply brahminical. Anna Hazare's narrative on the importance of vegetarianism is a case in point. He first contextualizes the issue within Hindu philosophy, according to which the world is composed of three traits: *rajas*, *tamas*, and *satva*. Every animate or inanimate being, humans included, is dominated by one of these traits. When a baby is born, it is free from all these; it is innocent and pure of heart. If a person, right from early childhood to his youth, is in the company

⁶⁵ Interview with Kailash Pote.

of *satvaguni* people, he develops into a *satvaguni* person. *Tamoguni* company results in a *tamoguni* nature; *rajoguni* creates a *rajoguni* bent of mind.⁶⁶ Anna deliberates on how a surfeit of non-vegetarian meals has led human beings to shed their innate peacefulness and harmlessness, and to their acquisition of the aggression and cruelty of the animal kingdom; he argues that vegetarians are normally peaceful and lead a harmless life, unless provoked, and that our own saints have emphasized and propagated a vegetarian diet from ancient times. 'We presented all these considerations to the people of Ralegan Siddhi', he says, 'and they were influenced by this to such an extent that there is no longer anybody who eats meat and all villagers have adopted vegetarian diet.'⁶⁷

This process found its corollary in the way Dalits were looked upon in the village and the change that was demanded of them. Anna says:

We used to go to their area sometimes and sat in front of one house. People used to gather there, wondering how this high-caste person has come to their place. This way, a faith relationship came into being. We continued going there off and on. Sometimes we asked from them water to drink and had food together. Based on this relationship, we started telling them why people kept them at a distance and what were the reasons behind it. We said that the society condemns you because your living is dirty, your food habits are dirty, and your thinking is dirty. Therefore, you have to change. With such constant hammering, the whole village turned vegetarian. The Dalits were also made vegetarian.⁶⁸

Rules and compliance thus find their validity in a particularly defined territory and population. Men and women, young and old, upper caste and lower, all must not only submit to rules imposed on them

⁶⁶ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 154.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 156. Presumably no one has dared tell Anna that the most notorious monster of modern times, Hitler, was vegetarian; in any case, Anna's logic would suggest that Hitler was barbaric despite his vegetarianism because he was provoked.

⁶⁸ Interview of Anna Hazare by journalist Rajesh Kumar.

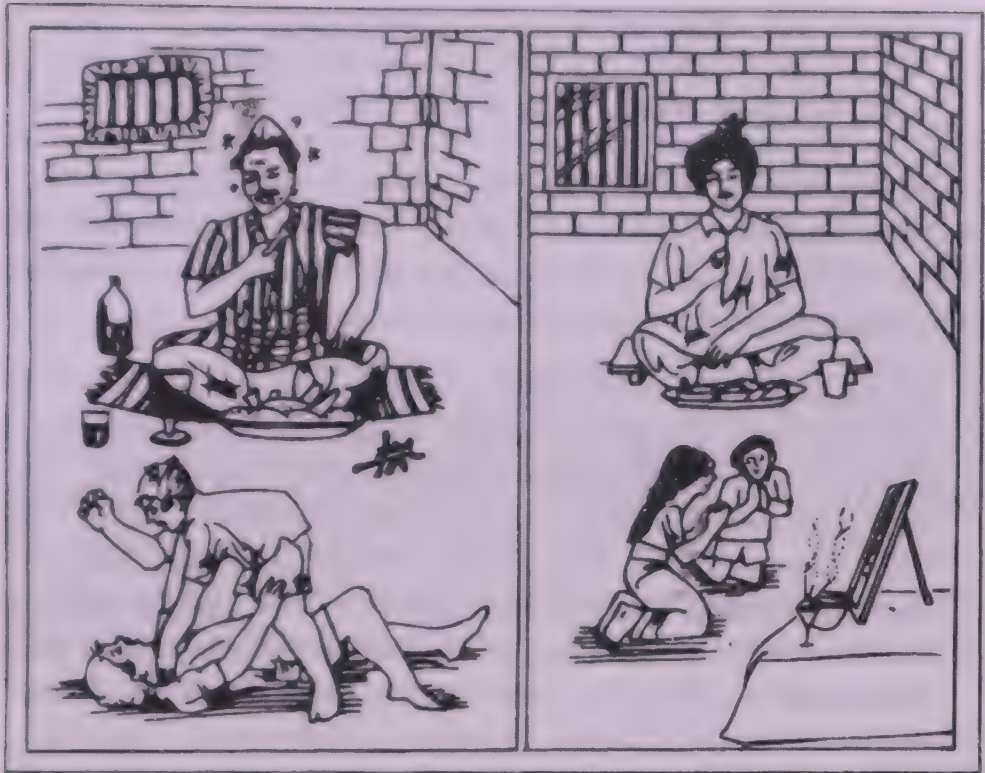


Fig. 3.2: The Importance of Vegetarianism

Source: Anna Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi: A Veritable Transformation*, p. 155

from above, they must also believe that these are not rules imposed but rules desired. No section of the population can be allowed to go its own way, independent of this Procrustean framework of iron rules. Children too must accept and support every such rule in order to reproduce the village's system of values. In the course of my fieldwork in Ralegan Siddhi I witnessed an everyday scene in the school campus of the village:

It was still a couple of hours before dawn, but within the boundaries of Sri Sant Niloba Rai Vidyalaya, the hostel boys were already awake and active. They were dressed in khaki shorts and white shirts, some with Gandhi caps. They were passing in a single file on their way to work in the school's fields. Some were cleaning the schoolrooms. From the huge loudspeaker system installed in the school, popular bhajans and songs in Hindi were reaching everywhere: 'Vande Mataram, Vande Mataram!', 'Sabarmati ke Sant Tune Kar Diya Kamal'. At around six

o'clock in the morning I saw that the school children were marching near the main chowk of the village and all were shouting slogans, 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan', 'Bharat Mata ki Jai', 'Hum Sab Ek Hain'.⁶⁹

The need for a pure and healthy cultural environment is emphasized in the rules meant for schoolchildren. A strong body, *samskars*, and Indian culture are the concerns around which these rules are woven. Thakaram Rauat, principal of the school, says:

In our secondary school, there is a five-point programme: body-building, physical work, character building, knowledge development, and patriotism. Children have to get up early in the morning. They have to do body-building exercises for two and a half hours in a day. They do manual work as part of their school curriculum. Every day they sing national and patriotic songs. They take a pledge, do *surya namaskar* and chant 'Om' for a minute. We believe that we need power and energy for all kinds of work and a sound body is the real means to achieve that.⁷⁰

All this has a considerable bearing on the village's environmental perspective. The emphasis on accomplishment and achievement has been one of the hallmarks of environmental movements and initiatives in India. The conservation of water and forests, the sustainable use of natural resources, and the conceptualization of people's programmes are enmeshed in the creation and consolidation of a singular moral authority, the plea for such conservation being a potent expedient to maintain power and authority. Anna Hazare firmly believes that spirituality, morality, and religion are part of a superstructure which is unsustainable without economic necessities being fulfilled, and therefore prosperity is their necessary base. He says when people were sleeping hungry in the village, nobody was ready to listen to his words. It was only after economic prosperity that they were willing to do *shramdaan*. And only then could they think of morality.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Fieldwork in Ralegan Siddhi in February 1991 and October 1999. Also see Sharma, *Landscapes and Lives*.

⁷⁰ Interview with Thakaram Rauat in Ralegan Siddhi, 6 February 1991 and 8 October 1999.

⁷¹ Interview with Anna Hazare.

A series of development programmes were charted out in the village. Watershed development, drinking water, agricultural production, milk production, a grain bank, social forestry, alternative energy sources, education, and an ideal village plan were a few among many that have been successfully implemented. They enhanced material welfare through an effective use of land and water resources—which were simultaneously deployed to generate or expand the base of moral authority. Anna was prepared to accomplish what had been chalked out and underline his moral vision regardless of the hostilities and opposition they evoked—even if it meant making an enemy of the government and the state, sitting on a dharna, or undertaking a ‘fast unto death’. Indeed, it was not its land and water development programme that made Ralegan Siddhi famous all over the state in the early 1990s but Anna’s massive campaign against corruption within rural development programmes.

The sense of accomplishment has found varied expression in the village. Mapari Ramdas, a villager, says, ‘It was difficult to even feed oneself earlier. Now those days are over. It is all because of Anna’s grace that we are managing our family well.’⁷² For Jai Singh Mapari, the milk business is a reference point: ‘Within the village, we collect 2,500 litre of milk every day for sale. In 15 days, we get a payment of more than three lakh rupees. Our village has earned name and fame. Anna is being recognized everywhere in the country, and he travels extensively all over.’⁷³ Machindra Balwant Sendge, a Dalit, has been engaged many years in his traditional occupation of making brooms and knitting ropes. He has 8 acres of rocky, unproductive land, which is barely sufficient to provide fodder for his cattle. He had worked for a daily wage outside the village. However, after the village’s development he has been getting enough work within the village and echoes the sentiments of many others when he says, ‘Anna is my God. Whenever he is in the village, I go to see him and receive his blessings. He is well known everywhere. He is from this village.’⁷⁴ Sakara Bai

⁷² Interview with Mapari Ramdas in Ralegan Siddhi, 6 October 1999.

⁷³ Interview with Jai Singh Mapari in Ralegan Siddhi, 6 October 1999.

⁷⁴ Interview with Machindra Balwant Sendge in Ralegan Siddhi, 6 October 1999.

Ganpat Gajare was a panchayat member for five years. She has a sense of satisfaction that liquor brewing units have shut down and alcoholism has stopped, and that consequently there are no incidents of wife-beating in the village any more. However, she goes on to say: 'Though we have more water, more fodder and more farming, our workload has actually increased tremendously. Even women contribute more through shramdan. We have many sewing machines in the village, but we do not have the time for any other work. Overall, therefore, we women have not achieved much.'⁷⁵ These examples suggest that the sense of accomplishment, going beyond material and physical well being, provides the moral basis for a regime.

The real and perceived feeling of continuous accomplishment in Ralegan Siddhi shows two other distinct elements. First, the village system can legitimately claim to make broader and long-term policies, covering not only the physical environment but also the social, political, and cultural life of the village. More important, achievement helps establish its own institutions, partly by justifying its own structure of governance and invalidating all others. There have been no gram panchayat elections in Ralegan Siddhi for well over two decades. No elections are allowed even to the many cooperative societies in the village that look after aspects of governance. Anna says: 'Representatives to the panchayat as well as of the societies are nominated in the gram sabha. Elections were not allowed here, as they bring party politics and divide the people. Electioneering also destroys unity in the village. I have now started saying that there should be elections. However, in Ralegan Siddhi village, people are not ready for that. They have fully adjusted to the method of nominations. It has proved best for them.'⁷⁶ He takes every possible opportunity to question electoral and party politics and it is his firm view that power and politics cause corruption: 'Those who wish to involve themselves in our anti-corruption movement will have to take a pledge not to get involved in party politics, nor to contest elections.'⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Interview with Sakara Bai Ganpat Gajare in Ralegan Siddhi, 14 October 1999.

⁷⁶ Interview with Anna Hazare.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

There is no space or legitimacy here for the formal structures of democracy. Posters and pamphlets are not allowed during the state or national elections, nor direct election campaigning. Machindra Balwant Sendge, a villager, says: 'In our village, the offices of political parties, their signboards or flags do not exist. We never allow them to exist here.'⁷⁸ The virtual ban on political activities inside the village goes deeper, turning into an ideology of rejection of politics of every kind. The value of elections and voting is reduced to an enforced necessity. Another villager emphasizes: 'Nobody is honest or competent in politics today. Even good people become bad after entering politics. That is why we are not interested in politics. Those who work for our village and for us get our votes.'⁷⁹

Setting Goals

Anna Hazare believes in setting aims and objectives for the individual and society. For individuals, these can be as hard as 'setting his lifetime goals', 'dedicating his life entirely to his work', 'doing the work in a determined way, step by step, ignoring the criticism and the opposition', 'ready to face death if necessary', etc. For society, they can be as wide as 'the creation of a self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-administered village', 'the achievement of an ideal village', 'village as the unit of planning', 'watershed development', etc. The aims and objectives propounded by Anna carry present need as the context, a critique of the individual and society, and precise solutions. As an ideology of the developmental and environmental aims, this sketches out a structure for the future, and an ideal vision of the individual and society. It is primarily on the basis of this ideology's carrying capacity—of present needs and future ideals—that the outlined aims and objectives acquire authority. The objective is the driving force here; the means, processes, and ideas of freedom and democracy take a back seat. An environmentalist objective defines the content and form of an entire socio-political system.

⁷⁸ Interview with Machindra Balwant Sendge in Ralegan Siddhi, 6 October 1999.

⁷⁹ Interview with Pathare Bala Saheb Ganpat.

To replicate the development experiences of Ralegan Siddhi at a macro level the Government of Maharashtra launched an Adarsh Gaon Yojana in 1992. Spearheaded by Anna, this programme aimed at developing 300 villages in Maharashtra using Ralegan Siddhi as a model. The budget for each village, selected under this programme, was Rs 50 lakh. The funds provided by the government were routed through the Adarsh Gram Office, headed by Anna. The objective of the programme was to demonstrate that an individual, a family, and a village can be made self-sufficient, with sustainable use of the environment and an emphasis on conservation, being the village's hallmarks. Regarding the scheme and its implementation in present-day India, it was argued: 'Today many villages are fragmented due to divided opinions. People are selfish and unprepared to think about the welfare of their neighbours. Greed for power and money, alcoholism and other vices prevent people from thinking about common welfare. Against this background, it is not easy to create ideal villages.'⁸⁰ An 'ideal village' and 'self-reliance and self-sufficiency as stressed by Mahatma Gandhi' are ideas that have been frequently used to legitimize various programmes and policies, values and means in independent India. Anna outlines his philosophy and principles for conservation of nature and sustainable rural development in these words:

The village needs to be united and involved in the planning process. Sparring factions and socially created barriers such as the caste system in the village usually make it difficult to implement development projects, which are meant to benefit the community as a whole. The Adarsh Gaon Yojana requires villagers to take an oath that they will follow the five principles. Shramdan is a good way of getting the villagers together to work for the welfare of their village. Shramdan transcends artificial social barriers, and fosters a feeling of unity, of working together for the common welfare of the community.⁸¹

This interpretation of the ideal village claims truth and perfection for itself. It argues that its success is based on a strict adherence to its

⁸⁰ Hazare, Pangare, and Lokur, 'Preface', in *Adarsh Gaon Yojana*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–27.

proclaimed values and principles. It claims to speak for the community as a whole, though in fact its personal and emotional appeal serves to justify the role and goal of a specific person. This personal authority, strengthened by the official sanction conferred on it, is valorized for a hegemonic end: all must accept its values and principles as the only legitimate ones. The very process of idealizing and replicating an environmental model negates the possibility of holding any other version of rural development as truthful or better or correct.

At the level of ideology, the goal of creating an ideal village provides a rational relationship between the desired end and the role given to a person or group. At the level of institutions, it is the personal authority, the temple, the nominees, the committees, and the codes that provide the ideal with a support system. And a value system that denies the existence of conflict and contradiction, and fetishises 'natural' harmony, feeds into the ideal.

Nation and Nation-Building

Anna says: 'I close this story of the village development at Ralegan Siddhi with the fervent request and hope that every village should achieve similar success and build our India into a strong, powerful nation.'⁸² A colourful poster with the slogan 'Ideal Village, Ideal Nation' is displayed in many parts of Ralegan Siddhi.⁸³ The idea of a strong nation and nation-building is firmly entrenched in people's consciousness and the work they do here. Environmentally sound rural development is the effective means to make that idea a reality, and extending the ideal outwards into the nation is for Anna a matter of life and death. The meaning of such a nation took specific shape in him at the time of the Indo-China war in 1962 and crystallized during the Indo-Pak war in 1965. He is emotional when recounting these experiences:

1962 was a difficult time for our nation. China betrayed us and occupied a large portion of our territory. Our armies were suffering heavily. I wanted to do something for my country. A desire to join

⁸² Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 159.

⁸³ I saw many such in the course of my fieldwork.

the army for this purpose drove me there. I was determined to live and die for the country. . . . In 1965, when Pakistan attacked us, my transport unit was operating in the Khemkaran sector. There was too much of a risk from the land mines laid by the enemy. One day the enemy aircraft started strafing on our convoy of 17–18 vehicles. Many jawans of our convoy were seriously injured or died. I was able to move, though a bullet grazed my head too. It was a virtual rebirth for me, and I decided to devote my life to social work after retirement.⁸⁴

Narratives of war, army, and enemy remain core references in much of the discourse on nation and rural development in Ralegan Siddhi. This has also something to do with the fact that more than 200 people from this village are in the Indian army, and most families have at least one member employed in it.⁸⁵ However, this particular developmental discourse—in which the army, the war, and environmental engineering become one—as well as the aspects of the village consciousness that are articulated as strict codes, discipline, etc., are linked to ways in which nation and nation-building as well as the attendant culture and values, are conceptualized here: nation as ideal, nation as sufferer, nation as victim, nation as victor against the enemy. Rural development and its agents have to aid this war of the nation, for the nation, by the nation.

‘National regeneration’, ‘nation-building’, ‘village development is the key to overall national uplift’, ‘wholesome crop of national glory through comprehensive rural development’—these expressions of Anna and Ralegan Siddhi are not enough in themselves. They are coupled with other tasks, expressions, and appeals such as, ‘We have to hold the nation. Otherwise, Pakistan will grab it. That is why we consciously send our sons to the army.’⁸⁶ The idea that nation-building must be the guiding principle finds other justifications: it is argued that certain greedy and corrupt people want to divide the country:

⁸⁴ Interview with Anna Hazare.

⁸⁵ This was highlighted in my interview with *sarpanch* Ganpat Pidi Aauti and many others in the village.

⁸⁶ Interview with H.Y. Mapari.

'They are in Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Punjab, Kashmir. Our powerful army can do many wonders. Our country can be the most prosperous and peaceful in this world.'⁸⁷

These voices can at times be stridently masculinist and assertive. For example, school pupils are taught to be nationalists. They are taught to believe in national integration. Boys in the school are put in groups named after Shivaji, Bhagat Singh, and Rajguru, names intended to arouse ideas associated with freedom and development. Images connected with women like Jhansi ki Rani are not accepted among the boys. Once, a group was named after her, but it was soon cancelled.⁸⁸ These thoughts swell into the village's rural development discourse: 'The way army jawans jointly attack enemies and control them, we can similarly tackle problems here in the village.'⁸⁹ And:

If each one of us imbibes national spirit, social commitment, and works hard, something good can still be attained and the dangers currently facing the country as well as future generations could be avoided . . . Little bit of sacrifice on the part of everyone for the country and abandoning the consumerist western lifestyle has become essential . . . If these leaders devote their wealth, mind and body selflessly for the benefit of the society and the country, the general public may not have wealth but they would devote their bodies and mind equally sincerely for nation-building efforts.⁹⁰

The case is made for a united, integrated country: 'If we want to make India united and integrated, we should go deeper. If we embrace the religion of humanity, we can achieve this goal.'⁹¹

Events and Incidents

In social and political life a particular moment or an issue, an event or a series of incidents, can be taken to a climax. This heightened

⁸⁷ Interview with Lakshman Pathare.

⁸⁸ Interview with Raja Ram Shankar Gajare, an activist in the school hostel in Ralegan Siddhi, 14 October 1999.

⁸⁹ Interview with Lakshman Pathare.

⁹⁰ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, pp. x–xi.

⁹¹ Interview of Anna Hazare by journalist Rajesh Kumar.

stage can generate deep emotions and galvanize people enormously in support of a cause. Such instances are politically defining moments: 'By its very nature, a politically defining moment has enormous moral authority that can legitimate certain causes while delegitimizing others. Political institutions may be legitimated or delegitimated by these moments . . . Legitimization based on a politically defining moment is not free of disputation and will not be durable unless, as in the case of personal authority, it is institutionalized on the basis of an ideology.'⁹² Anna Hazare has been able to create these politically defining moments. Some years ago, faulty transmission and low voltage caused several pump-sets to burn out. Despite repeated requests by the villagers for a sub-station, government agencies took no action. Anna went on a hunger strike and had to be hospitalized after nine days. This led to a *rasta roko andolan* by the villagers. In the police firing that ensued, four people were killed. Later, the government sanctioned money to set up a sub-station. On another occasion, the education department refused recognition to a school that the villagers had constructed. It was alleged that the education minister was penalizing the villagers for not voting for him in the elections. After several futile meetings, Anna threatened to go on an indefinite hunger strike. He addressed the panchayat, 'If I die, do not cremate me, but bury me under the steps of the village temple.' The deeply moved and surcharged villagers *gheraoed* the *zila parishad* the next day and obtained recognition for the school. Based on this experience, Anna draws some universal and wider conclusions: 'Since many administrators lack real national spirit and have rigid attitudes, it is inevitable that some of us may have to lose our lives in dealing with social problems.'⁹³

⁹² Muthiah Alagappa, 'The Bases of Legitimacy', in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*, California, Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 46–7.

⁹³ Anna Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 113. This incident and some others like it were narrated in detail by Anna Hazare in February 1991. Many villagers like Jai Singh and Lakshman Pathare, interviewed by me in October 1999, also gave some account of the incident. The book by Anna Hazare also has a detailed account of it.

The anti-corruption movement was also a socially and politically defining moment for Anna. Inspired by a continuous and common set of grievances in his district, as well as in others, he decided to take up the issue of grassroots corruption in the early 1990s. He began groundwork by writing letters to all the gram panchayats in the district and sought information on two things: first, whether the rural water supply scheme was working in their area, and, second, details of what had been purchased under the social forestry schemes and at what rates. It was revealed through this process that the rural water scheme was not working in 165 gram panchayats and that many worthless instruments had been purchased at highly inflated rates under the social forestry scheme. As lone crusader, Anna began a silent fast in December 1990 and returned the Indira Priyadarshni Vrikshamitra Award given to him by the Government of India. He declared his intention to return his Padmashree as well. Then came the proposal of the state government to constitute inquiry committees. Thereafter Anna broke his fast on 17 January 1991 in a meeting attended by more than 600 representatives of social and political organizations from all over the state. He put forward another demand: the formation of an inspection committee of five members—none from political parties—at the village, block, and district levels. If the government did not accept this vital demand, he said he would tour the entire state to form the committee. If no action was taken, he and his supporters would not only organize *morcha* and *gherao*, but even take the law into their own hands and beat corrupt officials out in the open.⁹⁴ Based on these series of anti-corruption movements Anna defined his political position more broadly and had it accepted through his villagers. This position again outlined his belief that anybody taking part in anti-corruption would have to take a pledge not to associate with a political party or contest elections.

⁹⁴ For details, see Mukul, 'Bhrashtachar Unmulan nein Bechain Kar Diya' (Anxiety over the Elimination of Corruption) and 'Shramshakti ka Pratik hai Ralegan Siddhi' (Ralegan Siddhi: A Symbol of Labour Power), both in *Navbharat Times*, Delhi, 11 February 1991 and 13 February 1991, respectively.

Morality

In relation to morality and related codes, behaviour, and practices, one observer remarks: 'Anna's leadership is "moral". Ralegan's example has shown that moral leadership works with the people even 50 years after the death of Mahatma Gandhi. Sacrifice has always been highly valued in Hindu philosophy. It established the moral authority of a person . . . Moral leadership also has the advantage of bringing out the best in ordinary people.'⁹⁵ The strong personal basis of Anna's concept of morality, which has evolved with his life experiences and personal commitments, has often been highlighted. Less observed has been his emphasis on morality as a fundamental aspect of a pure and clean cultural and social environment, and this as the basis of a strong nation and nation-building. This is a vision which comprehensively spells out the desired practices of everyday social life. 'People should have good *samskar* to do service. They should believe in *nishkam karmayog*'; 'It is necessary for people to retain their humanity along with prosperity'; 'Prosperity and the sharing of wealth brings equity'; 'Differences between the rich and the poor will remain, but the poor should get some share of the prosperity.'⁹⁶ There are other moral values alongside these. For schoolchildren there is moral education and practice, which comprises elements of physical training, bodybuilding, obedience, patriotism, gender equality, national integration, the scientific temper, and sensitivity.⁹⁷ Women are expected to look after the household, but they must also look beyond and get out of the house to participate in activities intended to help neighbours, community, and country. 'Woman is the Universal Mother, The Great Mother. Many such Great Mothers have given birth to Great Sons—Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Swami Vivekananda, for instance. She is also a symbol of purity, sublime as well as innate strength. She can, if she means it, make a God out of a mortal being and build a model, healthy society.'⁹⁸ Morality here becomes

⁹⁵ Awasthi, 'Rural Development', p. 79.

⁹⁶ These are based on my two interviews with Anna Hazare. Many villagers and close associates of Anna substantiate these views in their own words.

⁹⁷ Based on my interview with principal Thakaram Rauat.

⁹⁸ Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 89.

identity, directing everyday social life in a clear hierarchical and gendered order.

Many of the problems of morality among children, the youth, and the village are outlined in relation to Western influence or a modern materialist culture. 'The West', 'Western lifestyle', 'modern development', and 'invasion of Western culture' invariably signify the collapse of morality in modern India.⁹⁹ The world is now full of 'indecent' cinema posters on roads, TV; videos show 'undesirable' moral values; 'lurid' songs blare from tape recorders and loudspeakers; 'pornographic' books and magazines can be bought off roadside stalls; drunkards emerge from government-sponsored liquor shops; teachers and parents no longer act out their own precepts; all these collectively divert clean minds from clean ends.¹⁰⁰ 'The youth of the country represent our real strength', says Anna. 'The enemy is trying to spread addiction to various drugs among the young generation. It is sad that hundreds of thousands of young men in our country are falling prey to such addictions and are losing their enthusiasm and capacity to do something constructive for themselves, their families and the country.'¹⁰¹ The unification of anxieties under the fold of morality is a plea for the well being of villagers in need of being saved from the scourge of modernity, but it is also quite obviously intimately associated with a precise regimen being prescribed to the nation.

Dalits

In Ralegan Siddhi there are Mahars, Chamars, Matangs, Nhavis, Bharhadis, and Sutars. The first three are considered amongst the lowest in the Hindu caste structure. Barring a few STs, the rest of the villagers are Marathas.¹⁰² Since the beginning of his work in the village, Anna has particularly emphasized the removal of untouchability,

⁹⁹ These were invariably used by Anna Hazare, Thakaram Rauat, and Lakshman Pathare, during my long interviews and informal meetings with them.

¹⁰⁰ Anna Hazare, *Ralegan Siddhi*, p. 69.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁰² This information was given to me in October 1999 by *gram sewak* K.N. Bhagat in Ralegan Siddhi.

social barriers, and discriminations of caste against those popularly referred to as 'Harijans' here. There have been many efforts on his part to do away with the ban on Harijans' entry into the temple and against allowing them to draw water from the same well as everyone else. The Harijans are now present in every function of the village. They are a part of the community marriage programme, alongside the other castes. They are associated with several committees formed to run village affairs, and they take active part in several village festivals. On some occasions they cook or serve food to all the villagers and even perform puja. The village once repaid a bank a loan of Rs 75,000 taken by Harijan families. Within many economic programmes Harijans have been chosen to be the first beneficiaries. The concept of 'village as a joint family', or 'all inhabitants of the village as almighty God', prompted villagers to give attention to the problems of Harijans.¹⁰³

However, the Dalits themselves see it differently. Kailash Pote is a landless Chamar who pursues his traditional occupation and also works as a farm labourer. For him, the meaning of village, family, and Hinduism is expressible thus:

We do not call Ralegan Siddhi a village. We call it a family in which Annajee is the headman and we are the people who provide service to the family. Here Hindus mean Marathas only. We Chamars and Mahars are never called Hindus. How can we claim that everybody is equal here? People who have land or jobs in the military have a different level of development. There is a lot of difference between others and me.¹⁰⁴

Lakshman Dondiwa is another Dalit. In the course of an agitation for electricity in the village many years ago, he was injured when the police opened fire. He remembers how Anna took care of him like a mother. He and other members of his caste are now free from the clutches of moneylenders, and this has turned him into a devotee of Anna. However, he goes on to remark: 'We have food, clothing and

¹⁰³ For details, see Awasthi, 'Rural Development', pp. 79–81.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Kailash Pote.

houses now. However, that is all. There is nothing more to it than that. Shoes are for the feet and will always be placed there. We are like the shoes. We will never be able to go ahead beyond this point. The village ethos is such.'¹⁰⁵ Twenty-five-year-old Kailash is landless. He knows how to drive and has a driver's licence but must survive on wage labour. He says: 'I was poor before and am poor now. We were starving in the past and the situation has not changed for me. I cannot even afford to educate my children. I cannot even open my mouth. Whatever is said in this village, it has to be followed.'¹⁰⁶

The village includes three Matang houses. Their inhabitants are still tied to their traditional occupation, making brooms and ropes. They also work as agricultural labourers. They own some forest land, but according to them it only provides fodder for cattle. One of them says, 'We get work in the village. However, it is barely enough. We need some support, work or job. Since there is no alternative, we try to be happy.'¹⁰⁷ Mathura Dharmagadka was a vice-sarpanch until recently. During her time there was an all-women panchayat for five years. She remarks: 'We women learnt how to run the panchayat and since there was no male member, we could speak freely. However, we cannot do anything about the wage difference between male and female labourers in the village. A male labourer gets Rs 50 a day, whereas it is only Rs 30 for females.'¹⁰⁸

Namdeo Arjun Mapari, a poor Maratha, also strikes a dissenting note. He has 2 acres of land, but it is mostly rocky and unproductive. He and his three sons work as agricultural labourers. He says: 'We all worked for the development of the village. I did shramdaan along with other villagers. Our village and watershed programme are world famous. However, in our land and well there is no water. We have not benefited from all the water flowing in the village.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Lakshman Dondiwa in Ralegan Siddhi, 15 October 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Kailash in Ralegan Siddhi, 15 October 1999.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Machindra Balwant Sendge.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Mathura Dharmagadka in Ralegan Siddhi, 6 October 1999.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Namdeo Arjun Mapari in Ralegan Siddhi, 10 October 1999.

There may be many explanations for the way Dalits are placed in Ralegan Siddhi. Within the locality and the community they are largely still tied to their traditionally ascribed status and occupation. Simultaneously, unequal possession of land and utilization of water, exploitative labour relations and low wages, besides other forms of power, do exist and continue to work against the Dalits. The notion of Dalits as 'dirty' prevails. And the village republic works in a way that prevents broader values and codes and rules, as well as places and performances assigned within it, from being challenged. The Dalits' own perceptions are clearly formed as much by the authoritarian discourse as by their own contesting experiences.

The idea of the integration of Dalits into an ideal village has two components in Ralegan Siddhi. The first is the assumption that they were always there to perform some duties and necessary services and that it is this usefulness that justifies their existence today. As Anna expresses it: 'It was Mahatma Gandhi's vision that every village should have one Chamar, one Sunar, one Kumhar and so on. They should all do their work according to their role and occupation, and in this way a village will be self-dependent. This is what we are practising in Ralegan Siddhi.'¹¹⁰ The other component is hegemonic, designed to persuade Dalits to accept their status within the brahminical fold. This is not only manifest in the way food or dress habits are propagated, it is clear in several direct and indirect ways too. The *Organiser*, the RSS mouthpiece, carried a series of articles on Anna Hazare and Ralegan Siddhi in which the writer expressed deep admiration for the model being followed.¹¹¹ Regarding the incorporation of Dalits he remarks:

Anna-saheb Hajare imprinted on the minds of the villagers that, as children of the same God, any discrimination on the basis of one's birth would be reprehensible to Him . . . To start with, the young workers called a meeting of the Harijans in the village. Together they decided to bury the bitter memories of the past and start a fresh page

¹¹⁰ Interview with Anna Hazare.

¹¹¹ H.V. Seshadri, 'The Village that Reminds Us of Ramarajya', *Organiser*, 8 February 1987, pp. 6 and 10, and H.V. Seshadri, 'Ralegana Sindi: A Name for Social Metamorphosis', *Organiser*, 15 February 1987, p. 11.

of social equality and harmony. On their part, the Harijans decided to give up carrying of dead animals, eating their flesh and also vices like *ganja*, gambling, etc. The meeting was followed by efforts for cleanliness and sanitation in their houses and their neighbourhood and imparting of healthy *samskaras* to their children.¹¹²

Anna's concern for Dalits works at many levels. One is the ritual organized for the Dalits, to integrate them into a whole. Here the ritual centrality of the dominant caste is significant. These rituals also come through his totalizing discourse on purity and pollution, which embrace political and economic power. Here we also see the importance of the practice of gift-giving for the cultural construction of dominance.¹¹³ In his ethnographic history of an untouchable community, the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh, Saurabh Dube shows how a complex interplay and overlap of discourses constituted caste relations in the context of power: 'The ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution and the ritual centrality of kingship and dominant caste(s) were both symbolic schemes that elaborated modes of domination and power. Defined by meanings and practices that articulated and were articulated by relations of authority, they worked together to secure the subordination of the Satnamis and other untouchable communities in Chhattisgarh.'¹¹⁴ In Ralegan Siddhi the position of Dalits is grounded not only in rituals and a language of integration, but also in the concept of a united family. And these are cemented by continuous references to religion, the centrality of the dominant caste, and the authority of an environmental leader.



¹¹² Seshadri, 'Ralegana Sindi', p. 11.

¹¹³ For details see Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift: Ritual, Presentation and the Dominant Caste in a North Indian Village*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 28. She points out that the proper presentation and acceptance of *daan*, which ensures the well being of the entire community, is far more important than hierarchical considerations in structuring inter-caste relationships in the village.

¹¹⁴ Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780–1950*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 214–15.

In spite of the apparent diversities that characterize the various elements that make up Anna Hazare and Ralegan Siddhi, we find an underlying thread of unity in the ideological system of a green village. Authority and its legitimacy are the key. Not only is this authority deeply rooted in the dominant socio-political tradition of the region, it is also often blind to many basic and universal issues of rights, democracy, and justice. Personal moral authority, while contributing in harnessing water and other natural and human resources to the betterment of villagers, simultaneously raises significant questions about its relationship to the making of a democratic, critical community, free from burdens of force, punishment, coercion, obligation, patronage, charity, and piety. There are other obvious limitations as well. Because a plural and democratic culture is absent, even genuinely motivated reform endeavours such as this make it difficult to imbibe, evolve, and transfer personal moral authority to independent successors and followers.

The legitimization of moral authority is necessarily complex and variegated. This legitimization is at times also an interactive process between the leader and the villager. Achieved as an outcome of a long journey, it is contingent, dynamic, and continuously defined. However, the basis of this ideal village is a command-obedience relationship that is seen as legitimate. It is seen as such because it is rooted in shared norms and values, in established rules and codes, in the exercise of power for the promotion of a community's common good, and in the service of the unity and integrity of nation and nation-building. In sum, the sustainable use of natural resources in the village legitimizes the belief of the villagers in the moral right of their leader to issue commands, and the corresponding obligation of the people to obey his commands. Crucial to this genuine reform experiment is the absolute removal from within its precincts of many of the defining ideas of modern democracy.

Passages from Nature to Nationalism Sunderlal Bahuguna and the Tehri Dam Opposition in Garhwal

The Chipko leader Sunderlal Bahuguna and his long-standing opposition to the Tehri dam in Garhwal have been significant within Indian environmental movements in general, and for struggles against big dams in particular. This chapter explores the shifting contours of the anti-Tehri dam movement over the past three decades. It focuses on the changing declarations of environmentalists, especially Sunderlal Bahuguna, the Tehri Bandh Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti (Committee for Struggle against the Tehri Dam, i.e. TBVSS), and other leaders of the movement on the one hand, and the involvement of the VHP on the other, in their opposition to the construction of the Tehri dam, and over the damming of the river Ganga. Exploring the evocations of nature, religion, and nation in their different phases by these two groups of actors, I argue that, through a regular use of certain mythical beliefs and simplified dichotomies, there has been a sometimes inadvertent collaboration between Green and Saffron. Visions of the Ganga as holy mother, of national security and unity, and of fear and revenge criss-cross other debates over the dam—such as costs and benefits, displacement and rehabilitation—and at times undermine the far more complex issues of democracy, social justice, and sustainable development. Through the regular use of these religious symbols and myths, environmental, developmental, and moral concerns became narrowly politicized, even as fundamental

differences between environmental movements and authoritarian political forces were obscured.

In the long journey of opposition to the Tehri dam since the 1970s, much has been researched and written about the dam and its safety, about Sunderlal Bahuguna and the movement. However, the language and politics of the movement, its vision of the nation, its approach towards the history and culture of local society, and its alliance with certain socio-political forces have received scant attention. Least heard are the changes and shifts in the movement in one of its crucial and final phases after the 1990s. Instead, the initial versions of the movement and its concerns have been used and reused, in both environmental and developmental narratives. I focus here specifically on the later period alterations and their implications.

Uttarakhand: The Historical Context

According to Haripriya Rangan, the region of Uttarakhand has been bestowed with a variety of official identities and histories: the independent kingdoms of Garhwal and Kumaon; the satrap kingdoms of the Mughal empire; the western colonies of the Nepalese Gurkha kingdom; as British Garhwal and Kumaon, administrative regions of the North-West Provinces and the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh; and as eight mountain districts (five under the Garhwal Regional Commission and three under the Kumaon Regional Commission) incorporated within the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP).¹ Each of these official designations has represented the efforts of administrators and political actors, past and present, to spatially

¹ The Uttarakhand region embraced the eight hill districts of the state of Uttar Pradesh. These districts were Pauri, Chamoli, Tehri, Uttarkashi, and Dehradun (which constitute Uttarakhand's Garhwal region); and Almora, Pithoragarh, and Nainital (which constitute Kumaon). The new state of Uttaranchal came into existence in November 2000 and comprised thirteen districts: Almora, Nainital, Pithoragarh, Bageshwar, Champawat, Udham Singh Nagar, Dehradun, Pauri, Tehri, Chamoli, Uttarkashi, Rudrapur, and Haridwar. Four new districts were announced on 15 August 2011: two in Garhwal—Kotdwar and Yamunotri; and two in Kumaon—Dehradun and Ranikhet.

demarcate the variations made to existing patterns of social networks and material practices through economic conjunctures and political events.² Even though the opposition to the Tehri dam deals with a highly complex set of new issues and a multiplicity of stakeholders—for example, analyses of technical, social, and environmental variables; cost/benefit ratios; geology and seismicity; public-sector planners; NGOs and activists—Sunderlal Bahuguna and the TBVSS have alongside taken important cues from the history of the region and dominant historical conceits in shaping their arguments and actions. There are five important historical factors to be considered here: (i) ecological and cultural underpinnings in the Garhwal region; (ii) the agrarian and rural environment; (iii) the development discourse of backwardness and progress; (iv) social movements; and (v) political changes till the 1990s.

Ecological and Cultural Underpinnings of the Garhwal Region

In dealing with the cultural ecology of the Himalayas, the environmental historian Ramachandra Guha explores the ecological characteristics of mountain society in both Tehri-Garhwal and Kumaun: how the distinctive class structure meshed with other ecologically determined hallmarks of mountain society, and the close integration of agriculture with forests and pasture; how through religion, folklore, and tradition this region's village communities drew a protective ring around the forests; how ecological constraints in the region in relation to the intensification and expansion of agriculture have historically resulted in a close regulation of the common property resources so crucial for the subsistence of individual households.³ This ecological context has many other specific dimensions. The mountainous region of Garhwal ranges in height from approximately 990 feet to

² Haripriya Rangan, *Of Myths and Movements: Rewriting Chipko into Himalayan History*. London, Verso, 2000, pp. 184–5.

³ Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, 1989, rptd Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2009, pp. 9–34.

more than 24,750 feet. On the basis of altitude, complexity of physiographic features, geological chronology, and structure the region can be divided from south to north into three major parallel zones or regions: the Outer Himalaya or the Sub-Himalaya or the 'Siwalik' zone; the Lesser or Lower or Middle Himalaya, also known as 'Himachal'; and the Greater or Inner or Main or Higher Himalaya, also known as 'Himadri'. All three regions can be further divided into valleys and ranges.⁴

The region has a rich Hindu history. It is said that the great philosophers of yore—spiritual souls and pilgrim forefathers, who were also ardent naturalists, voyagers, and explorers—not only made it a point to visit this sacred land at least once over their lifetime, but dotted it with religious sites and shrines so that people from far and wide, besides paying obeisance to their own deities, could also feel the varying moods of nature. The Garhwal Himalaya is often described as *devbhumi* and *tapobhumi* in the Hindu scriptures and epics.⁵ It is also believed that Garhwal is the seat of the Holy Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh—who, along with Lord Ganesh and Durga Ma, are known as the Panch Parmeshwar. The sacred Hemkunt Saheb, in the backdrop of the 'Valley of Flowers', has become known as a place for Sikh scholars to meditate on and interpret the verses of the holy *Granth Saheb*. Besides various gurudwaras, the region is punctuated by medieval mosques and some churches. It claims to be the custodian of Badrikadham, the origin of the Ganga, and the seat of solace for both ordinary Indians and complex non-conformist *tantriks*.⁶ In fact, the region has become synonymous with the idea of pilgrimage. But this pervasiveness of religion in Garhwal has also had several negative consequences: the accumulation of wealth and massive

⁴ Ajay S. Rawat, *History of Garhwal 1358–1947*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing Company, 1989, pp. 11–12.

⁵ O.P. Kandari and O.P. Gusain, 'Preface', in O.P. Kandari and O.P. Gusain (eds), *Garhwal Himalaya: Nature, Culture and Society*, Garhwal, TransMedia, 2001.

⁶ Anil Bhatt, 'And Why Not Uttarakhand/Uttaranchal', in J.C. Aggarwal and S.P. Agrawal (eds), *Uttarakhand: Past, Present and Future*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing House, 1995, pp. 385–9.

land-grabbing by high priests and caste Brahmins; the relegation of lower castes to supporting activities like cooking; landlessness among artisans and peasants; an oppressive oligarchy; and so on. Thus, religion is also held responsible for leading to an inequalitarian economic order.⁷

Apart from the venerated Ganga and Yamuna, originating in Garhwal and described in Puranic tradition, the Alaknanda, also sacred to Hindus, figures prominently in religious texts. It is believed that *amrit* (nectar)—the ocean's water which came down from heaven—gave rise to the sacred river, which goes through varying channels. The Alaknanda, the Vishnu Ganga, the Dhaulī, the Rishi Ganga, the Girthi Ganga, the Rudri Ganga, and many more rivers and lakes are associated with religious beliefs on the Ganga's origins and purity. The Ganga is seen as a goddess who possesses the power to absorb and absolve human and worldly impurities. Cited in the *Visnu Purana*, she washes away the impurities of the world just as she washed the foot of Lord Vishnu during her descent to earth.⁸ Bhagirathi, the other major headstream of the Ganga, is associated with King Bhagiratha, whose arduous penance secured the descent of the Ganga from the heavens to deliver his forefathers from the curse of the sage Kapil. The ascetic is said to have reduced the 60,000 sons of King Sagar to a soulless heap of ashes for having disturbed his meditations. Yamuna is identified as the daughter of Surya, the sun god, and as a sister of Yama, the lord of death. She is one of the many consorts of Krishna, the divine flute-playing cowherd.⁹ The location of many such sacred places as the founts of Hindu gods and goddesses within the region has helped identify it as vital to the Hindu mainstream. And the dominant literary language of the state, Hindi, has come to be associated with Indian nationalism. The region's contribution to national politics, the large-scale recruitment from it of jawans into the army,

⁷ Rawat, *History of Garhwal*, p. 208.

⁸ Bhagwati Prasad Nautiyal, 'Ganga: Aakash se Sagar Tak' (Ganga: From Sky to Sea), in Krishna Murthi Gupta and B.P. Nautiyal (eds), *Ganga: Ek Prakritik tatha Sanskritik Dharohar* (Ganga: A Natural and Cultural Heritage), New Delhi, Himalaya Seva Sangh, 1991, pp. 131–45.

⁹ Ashok Dilwali and Pushpesh Pant, *The Garhwal Himalayas: Ramparts of Heaven*, New Delhi, Lustre Press, 1987, pp. 11–19.

and a perception of them being the 'defenders' of the nation's boundaries with China have all gone into the making of a specific Hindu, martial, and national ethos.¹⁰

The Agrarian and Rural Environment

The Garhwal Himalayas present a particular agrarian and rural environment with specific agro-ecological features. Climate, altitude, and soil variations, a rugged terrain, and steep slopes are characteristic. Cultivable land is limited and the net sown area is quite small. Land is often infertile, there being severe soil erosion problems because of the steep slopes and the existing cultivation practices. Based on elevation and irrigation, several farming situations or zones have been identified, such as the irrigated lower hills, the rainfed lower hills, mid hills with a south aspect, mid hills with a north aspect, high hills, and very high hills. Sixty per cent of the agricultural area is within the mid hills zone—the major part being rainfed—and contributes to food production for the majority of the population. The major crops grown here are rice, *ragi*, *sawan*, wheat, potato, *toria*, mustard *rai*, peas, soyabean, horse gram, and *urad*. The irrigated lower hills are significant for the production of rice and wheat crops; rice and wheat rotate in this zone. The high hills and very high hills zones are important for cash crops like grain *amaranath*, buckwheat, and *rajmah*.

The horticulture industry occupies an important position in the farming system of the hill areas. Apple, pear, peach, plum, apricot, cherry, and walnut are grown at elevations of 1000 to 3000 metres above sea level. Livestock is important too, linking closely with the traditional rural small-scale industry. Handicrafts, dairy farming, and the production of wool and woollen cloth are the main cottage industries. Among handicrafts there are bamboo-based objects, ropes, and toys.¹¹

¹⁰ Pradeep Kumar, *The Uttarakhand Movement: Construction of a Regional Identity*, New Delhi, Kanishka Publishers, 2000, pp. 163–87.

¹¹ V.R. Trivedi, *Autonomy of Uttarakhand*, New Delhi, Mohit Publications, 1995, pp. 53–87.

The agrarian and rural contexts suggest a long continuum. At the time of Independence in 1947, the major economic activities in the Garhwal Himalaya centred on subsistence agriculture, forestry, seasonal pilgrimage services, and to a slighter degree the trans-Himalayan trade. The Himalayan districts saw little economic change during the first and second national Five Year Plans (1951–5 and 1956–60), although a few community development projects aimed at providing basic infrastructure and encouraging the formation of village-level cooperatives for artisanal production were tried out in the eastern districts of the Garhwal region. The border wars between India, China, and Pakistan (1962–5) had a profound impact on the region's economy by severely limiting the trans-Himalayan trade. As more than 75 per cent of the landholdings are less than 1 hectare in size, and the scope for expanding the cultivation of commodity crops is limited, most households without access to capital or alternative employment within their localities have been reduced to subsistence cultivation. These are neither adequate nor sufficiently remunerative in Garhwal, so hillmen are forced to migrate in search of work, augmenting household incomes with their remittances. Green Revolution policies too had little impact here, geared as they were towards increasing agricultural productivity in the Indo-Gangetic plains and other grain-producing regions in India. Moreover, a succession of natural disasters in the region in 1971 and 1972—heavy monsoons caused floods, landslides, and soil erosion—ended up damaging terraced cultivation greatly.¹²

The Developmental Discourse of Backwardness and Progress

In most official discourses, the Uttarakhand of the Garhwal and Kumaon Himalaya has been seen as backward, and therefore the need for its development and progress has been a regular prescription.¹³ It

¹² Haripriya Rangan, 'From Chipko to Uttaranchal: Development, Environment, and Social Protest in the Garhwal Himalayas, India', in Richard Peet and Michael Watts (eds), *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, pp. 205–26.

¹³ Purunchandra Joshi, *Uttarakhand ke Aaine mein Hamara Samaj* (Our

is often said that this ecologically and culturally rich region is one of the neglected regions of the country despite its rich natural resources. Denied economic justice, the development process here is almost as good as non-existent. Agricultural techniques and the developed variety of good seeds and fertilizers that have yielded results in the plains are unsuitable in the hills, which require a different set of techniques that have not been introduced. Industrial development too has seen negligible growth, and therefore industry is able to employ only a small percentage of the population. The infrastructure for industry is undeveloped. The region's backwardness has also been described in terms of a lack of basic amenities such as electricity, roads, bridges, credit, and marketing. Planned programmes have been marred by very long gestation periods and high costs. There is a dearth of social and public services, technical education, medical facilities, and drinking water. All this prevents the proper utilization of natural resources, and the growth in horticulture, tourism, forestry, and electricity generation has been very poor.¹⁴

The main instruments for encouraging the development of hilly and backward areas that have been suggested are: taking on specific projects, a central subsidy, a transport subsidy, income tax exemption, concessional credit from national and state financial institutions, hire-purchase facilities for machinery, price preferences by the state government, lower rates for electricity, and tax exemptions and interest-free loans for specific purposes to certain categories of people.¹⁵ In concrete terms, a Hill Development Department was created for the administrative set-up of all eight districts of the Uttarakhand

Society in the Mirror of Uttarakhand), New Delhi, Rajkamal Prakashan, 2003, pp. 139–43. Also see Manisha Aryal, 'Angry Hills: An Uttarakhand State of Mind', *Himal*, November–December 1994, p. 13.

¹⁴ Indu Tewari, *Unity for Identity: Struggle for Uttarakhand State*, New Delhi, K.K. Publishers & Distributors, 2001, pp. 28–51.

¹⁵ S.K. Goyal, 'Policies for Uplift of the Hilly and Backward Districts in India: A Critique', in T.S. Papola, B.K. Joshi, H.S. Verma, and R.C. Sinha (eds), *Development of Hill Areas: Issues and Approaches*, Bombay, Himalaya Publishing House, 1983, pp. 59–64.

region. In 1969, under the chairmanship of the chief minister, a Hill Development Council was formed. By 1974 a full-fledged separate Hill Development Department had come into being. In 1991 this department was given the name Uttarakhand Vikas Vibhag, which was changed to Uttarakhand Vikas Vibhag in 1994. From 1974 a separate sub-plan was prepared for the region.¹⁶ Decentralized planning for development was claimed to have been initiated in the region from 1982–3. Schemes were identified for each district, for which outlays were allocated to the districts and plans formulated. Of the total sub-plan expenditure for Uttarakhand, these schemes were estimated to account for about Rs 156 crore in the year 1992–3 and Rs 178 crore during 1993–4.¹⁷

A number of commissions, committees, government departments, and functionaries were created in the name of development. In 1988 a commission was set up to promote the growth of small-scale industries in the hill region of UP. Two regional development centres were set up for Garhwal and Kumaon Mandal, each headed by joint secretaries. An Uttarakhand division was opened within the State Planning Institute. An ordinance in 1992 announced a separate Hill Sub Cadre in 31 departments, comprising Groups B, C, and D posts. The incumbents to these posts were not to be transferred outside the hill districts, namely Almora, Chamoli, Dehradun, Nainital, Pauri Garhwal, Pithoragarh, Tehri Garhwal, and Uttarkashi. The government was empowered to determine from time to time the strength of the Hill Sub Cadre in any service.¹⁸

Social Movements

A series of social movements before and after 1947 raised issues in relation to forced labour, forests, untouchability, the exploitation of

¹⁶ *Development of Hill Region, Sixth Plan 1984–85*, Government of Uttar Pradesh, pp. 28–52.

¹⁷ *Proceedings of UP Vidhan Sabha First Session 1990*, Lucknow, Director Printing & Stationery, pp. 40–60.

¹⁸ Uttarakhand Vikas, *Uttarakhand Vikas Vibhag Development 1994–95 and Programme 1995–96*, Lucknow, U.P. Government, p. 23.

natural resources, and alcoholism. According to the well-known historian Shekhar Pathak, during colonial times Uttarakhand (1815–1947) experienced three kinds of social movements. The first comprised movements that were broad in scope, demanding improved relations between all castes and classes and general welfare. These centred around education, bonded labour, the forest, women, the welfare of tribals and craftsmen, and the construction of roads. The second type comprised movements based around particular castes or sub-castes and their concerns, some of which wanted to continue with the caste dogmatism and domination that were hallmarks of the past. However, Dalits were increasingly conscious of the need to fight oppression, gaining an education, forming their own organizations, resulting in localized oppositional movements. The third type was connected with the activities of Christian missionaries, who were taking up education and medical treatment for the poor. Overall, these strands contributed to raising the level of education and consciousness, and also spread a nationalist awakening in hill society.¹⁹

Uttarakhand also shows examples of movements in the pre-Independence period of both a subaltern and elite character. Militant resistance against unpaid labour in 1878–80, 1903–4, and 1921, and organized opposition against the state acquisition of forests between 1911 and 1917, were exceptionally successful. The movement of the farmers of Ascot to claim their rights over the land and the Gari Sadak Andolan in Garhwal over the construction of motor roads were important local movements.²⁰ Protests against the commercial exploitation of forests in Tehri Garhwal and Kumaun, the imposition of so-called scientific forest management, and the severe curtailment of traditional forest rights became a recurrent feature. Apart from movements such as these which occurred at regular intervals, the

¹⁹ Shekhar Pathak, 'Uttarakhand mein Samajik Andolanon ki Rooprekha' (An Outline of Social Movements in Uttarakhand), *Pahar*, no. 2, pp. 97–111. Also see Shekhar Pathak, *Uttarakhand mein Kuli Begar Pratha* (The Kuli Begar System in Uttarakhand), Delhi, Radhakrishna Prakashan, 1987.

²⁰ Shekhar Pathak and Ramachandra Guha, 'Sthaniya Itihaas, Jan Itihaas ya Rashtriya Itihaas' (Local History: Peoples' History or National History), *Pahar*, nos 3–4, pp. 200–13.

widespread contravention of forest laws represented the most tangible evidence of such protests.²¹ In British Kumaon violent and consistent protests were organized against forest policies, culminating in 1921 with a comprehensive challenge to the *kuli begar* system and a forest management that had almost choked the administration. Between 1921 and 1942 there were numerous instances of individual defiance of forest laws, the setting of forests on fire, and attacks on forest offices.²²

After the 1960s a new wave of social movements swept Uttarakhand. The best known was the Chipko movement of the 1970s and 1980s in the Garhwal region. Chipko means embracing a tree to protect it from commercial felling and the movement has been written about as one of the prominent environmental movements of the world: sociologists, historians, and environmentalists still debate the fundamental characteristics of the Chipko movement.²³ That upsurge was followed in rapid succession by movements against big dams, mining, and the sale and consumption of illicit liquor. Anti-liquor movements have had a vibrant presence in the Uttarakhand region, with a massive renewal in the early 1980s with the slogan *Nasha Nahin, Rozgar Do*.²⁴ Then, in the early 1990s, Uttarakhand saw a surge of mass action for a new hill state of the Indian union to be carved out of UP. People protested against the deprivation and backwardness of

²¹ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, pp. 48–9.

²² Ramachandra Guha, 'British Kumaun mein Van, Vyavastha aur Van-andolan' (The Forest in British Kumaun, System and Forest Movement), *Pahar Pustika 3: Uttarakhand Janandolan 1*, n.d., pp. 112–30.

²³ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*; Rangan, *Of Myths and Movements*; Shishupal Singh Kunwar (ed.), *Hugging the Himalayas: The Chipko Experience*, Gopeshwar, Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal, 1988; Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1988; Mukul, 'Villages of Chipko Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 April 1993, pp. 617–21.

²⁴ Shekhar Pathak, 'Nasha ek Shadyantra Hai: Uttarakhand mein Chal Rahe "Nasha Nahi Rozgar Do Andolan" ka Pristhabhoomi kei saath Varnan-Vishleshan' (Alcohol is a Conspiracy: A Discription-Analysis along with the Background of the Ongoing 'No Alcohol, Give Employment Movement' in Uttarakhand), *Pahar Pustika 1*, Nainital, 1985.

the region and raised their voice against 'stepmotherly' treatment by the state government. This movement had its own separate history of growth and development.²⁵

Political Changes till the 1990s

UP played an important role in national politics and the Uttarakhand region was more or less submerged in the mainstream politics of that state. Congress, the most influential party, allowed no reference to Uttarakhand statehood, so much so that Govind Ballabh Pant, who hailed from Uttarakhand and was one of the most important Congress leaders of UP, strongly opposed the idea of the bifurcation of the state because of his feeling that 'it would reduce the strength of the state in influencing the national politics of India.'²⁶

The 1962 war between India and China made the Indo-Tibetan border a major national security concern. In the late 1960s the Congress Party's power declined in many states, including UP, and there was an assertion of regional sentiments in Uttarakhand. Representatives of diverse peoples' organizations, individuals, and political leaders articulated the demand for separate statehood by organizing fronts, forums, and demonstrations. On the eve of the 1969 general elections, the electoral alliance between the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD) openly campaigned for separate statehood.²⁷ Hostilities between Hindus and Muslims in Bihar and UP caused much alarm at this time.²⁸ The 1977 general elections, held after the 'Emergency', decimated the Congress in UP: it lost all 85 seats to the Janata–Congress for Democracy alliance.

In 1979 a regional party of the hills was founded that owed its very name and origin to the demand for Uttarakhand—the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD). The 1980s saw fresh demands being

²⁵ Somen Chakraborty, *A Critique of Social Movements in India: Experiences of Chipko, Uttarakhand and Fishworkers' Movement*, New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1999, pp. 49–70.

²⁶ Suresh Nautiyal, 'Story of Statehood', *The Sunday Observer*, 29 September 1994, p. 8.

²⁷ Chakraborty, *Critique of Social Movements in India*, pp. 56–60.

²⁸ Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, Delhi, Picador, 2007, p. 431.

made for the formation of new states: Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. After the Janata Party's rout in the 1980 elections its Jana Sangh members broke away to form a party of their own, the BJP. The formation of the BJP heralded a wave of religious violence in northern and western India. There were major Hindu-Muslim riots in the UP towns of Moradabad (August 1980) and Meerut (September–October 1982).²⁹ In the early 1990s, after a period of relative post-Chipko and post-anti-alcohol peace, the Kumaun and Garhwal regions saw massive unrest once more over the formation of Uttarakhand. In the middle of 1994 the movement became most vocal and visible.³⁰

The great success story of Hindu nationalism and the main site of the BJP's rapid growth in the 1990s lay in UP. The Ramjanmabhoomi campaign to build a temple in Ayodhya was one of the important factors in this growth. The Ayodhya movement was not conceived for UP alone, but that is where the heart of the movement lay. The VHP launched its Ayodhya campaign in 1984 at a congregation on the banks of the Saryu—a prelude to the larger agenda of incorporating the disputed shrines issue into the main plank of communal mobilization.³¹ Religious pilgrimage and processions were the foremost instruments of socio-political mobilization, in which the VHP made use of a repertoire of rituals and symbols, including the sacredness of the Ganga, to propagate its message of Hindu unity, with major initiatives undertaken by the VHP in the 1990s.³² Over this time, communal and religious organizations came to exercise a new

²⁹ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, pp. 562–5.

³⁰ Aryal, 'Angry Hills', pp. 10–21. Also see, Joshi, *Uttarakhand ke Aaine mein Hamara Samaj*, pp. 139–44.

³¹ Zoya Hasan, 'Community and Caste in Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh', in Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (eds), *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 94–5.

³² Peter van der Veer, 'Hindu Nationalism and the Discourse of Modernity', in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds), *Accounting for Fundamentalism: The Dynamic Characteristics of Movements*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 653; see also Geeta Puri, 'Religion and Social Movement: The Case of Vishva Hindu Parishad', in Shibani Kinkar Chaube and Bidyut Chakraborty (eds), *Social Movements in Contemporary India*, Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1999, pp. 139–56.

influence on everyday life. The expansion and consolidation of the BJP and its allies in UP owed a lot to events like the VHP's Ram Shila Pujans, the *shilanyas* in Ayodhya, Rath Yatra, Sant Sammelan, the formation of the Sri Ram Kar Seva Samiti, the Kar Seva in Ayodhya, Asthi Kalash yatras, the demolition of the Babri mosque, and the unleashing of communal violence.³³ The deployment of sadhus as symbols of Hindutva, and towards the invocation of religion in political mobilization,³⁴ were specifically designed around a calendar of religious festivals, the use of temple premises as organizational centres for political activism, and for the propagation of Hindu aspirations.³⁵ This context is important to any analysis of the changing contours of the opposition to the Tehri dam.

Sunderlal Bahuguna and the Tehri Dam: A Profile

Sunderlal Bahuguna's opposition to the Tehri dam has been a great reference point for environmental movements in India. He has been diversely acclaimed as the best-known Chipko leader, father of the Chipko movement, freedom fighter, non-political person who strikes a chord in the hearts of those disenchanted with the hypocrisy of politicians and the electoral process, true follower and disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave working for the oppressed, environmental thinker and writer, charismatic personality whose deeds are the object of wonder, gentle crusader, unobtrusive messiah, a *rishi*, epitome of the TBVSS, convenor of the Himalaya Bachao Andolan, and much more.³⁶ Bahuguna himself has done much to maintain this plethora of views of him within Uttarakhand, India, and beyond.

³³ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 369–448.

³⁴ Virginia Van Dyke, 'The 1998 General Election: The Janus-faced Policies of the BJP and Religious Mobilization at the District Level in Uttar Pradesh', in Roy & Wallace, *Indian Politics*, pp. 105–28.

³⁵ Hasan, 'Community and Caste', pp. 100–1.

³⁶ There are several write-ups on Sunderlal Bahuguna by writers, journalists, historians, and academics. For example, see Tenzin Rigzen (ed.), *Fire in the Heart, Firewood on the Back: Writings on and by Himalayan Crusader Sunderlal*

A prolific writer and communicator, he has written articles, leaflets, and booklets on a wide range of environmental issues concerning Uttarakhand and the Himalayas, and on development, economics, culture, ethics, and values.³⁷ Villagers constantly marvel at his remarkable physical endurance, sage-like appearance, simple living, personal asceticism, and communication skills. That he could, despite being non-political, draw the attention of the Indian government and national political leaders (including prime ministers) and make them intervene in the Tehri dam issue was seen as a big asset for the opposition.

For Bahuguna, the construction of the Tehri dam is tied to a development system which is based on two lies: one, that nature is a commodity; and, two, that society is only for human beings. This system he claims was born and developed in the West, where the state had vast colonies to exploit, a low population density, and a big area. However, the application of this system to densely populated countries has created a host of problems, one of which is the crisis of the Ganga. Instead, he argues, development here should be based on cultural values and its objective should be the achievement of peace, happiness, and fulfilment instead of affluence. The production system should be decentralized and run by human, animal, bio, solar, wind, tidal, and hydel (from the run of the river) energy. This would help save the Ganga from pollution created by big industries, big dams, and thermal and nuclear power stations. It is not the dam, but the

Bahuguna, Tehri, Parvatiya Navjeevan Mandal, 1997; Haripriya Rangan, *Of Myths and Movements*, pp. 27–32; Jeremy Seabrook, *Victims of Development: Resistance and Alternatives*, London, Verso, 1993.

³⁷ To name a few, Sunderlal Bahuguna, *Dharti ki Pukar* (Call of the Earth), New Delhi, Radhakrishna, 1996; idem, *Vikas aur Paryavaran* (Development and Environment), Amritsar, All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, 2005; idem, *Kate Jungle Roti Dharti* (Forests are Cut, Cries the Earth), Amritsar, All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, 1997; idem, *Save Himalayas*, Tehri, Save Himalaya Movement, 1994; idem, *Tehri Dam and High Dams in Himalaya*, Amritsar, All India Pingalwara Society, 1995; idem, *People's Programme for Change*, New Delhi, INTACH, 1992; idem, *Save Ganga*, Tehri, Save Ganga Campaign, n.d.

river Ganga, as seen from time immemorial, that can solve the problems of pollution and poverty in the region. Dense tree cover in its hill catchments must be restored by reviving natural vegetation to conserve its water. Trees that provide food, fodder, and fibre, besides medicinal herbs, must be cultivated. He stresses the tradition of worshipping the Ganga: this should be augmented by being backed up by science.³⁸ The concerns against the Tehri dam, in Bahuguna's view, can be extended into a Himalayan policy and thus give birth to the Save Himalaya Movement. This movement asks for 'A Himalayan policy in which inspiring aspects of Himalaya are maintained. The wounds of this great mountain system should be healed up. Himalaya should remain a living space for its permanent residents, spiritual seekers, pilgrims and tourists visiting for peace and enjoying scenic beauty. Resources should be used for regional economic self-sufficiency. There should be ban on indiscriminate exploitation and export of resources, like mining, deforestation, construction of big dams, etc.' The immediate steps recommended by Bahuguna, to heal the wounds caused by the Tehri dam and other such projects are (a) power generation from each and every stream and rivulet without flooding the cultivated land, forests, and habitats, and (b) maximum land use for afforestation with tree and shrub species that show a capacity to conserve soil and water, and those that provide food, fodder, fuel, fertilizer, and fibre to make local communities self-sufficient.³⁹

Bahuguna also relates his opposition to the Tehri dam with the broad cultural and religious beliefs of the Hindus in the region. He says there is a legend that the waters of the Bhagirathi can be contained only with the matted locks of Lord Shiva. The villagers believe that if there is any attempt to interfere with the flow of the sacred water, the Bhagirathi will exact a terrible vengeance. The Bhagirathi binds the whole country together into one unit. The thousands of pilgrims who visit the holy shrines in Uttarakhand will be aghast if their holy river is impounded into a lake and their places of inspiration connected with the great Vedantic saints go under water.⁴⁰ While evoking this

³⁸ Bahuguna, *Save Ganga*, p. 5.

³⁹ Bahuguna, *Save Himalayas*.

⁴⁰ Bahuguna, *Tehri Dam and High Dams in Himalaya*.

spirituality, Bahuguna puts forward an alternative agenda for action against the Tehri dam: the real spirituality for him is to see life in all living beings—in trees, in rivers, in mountains. That is what can constitute the ideal society. Spiritually informed science and technology can ensure that all living beings enjoy their birthright by giving priority to the plantation of the five Fs—food (nuts, edible seeds, oilseeds, honey), fodder, fuel, fertilizer, and fibre trees. These trees, of course, should be soil-builders and soil-improvers, those with the greatest capacity to conserve water, for soil and water are man's two basic capital resources. This will re-establish the harmonious relationship between man and Nature—the relationship of the Child with the Mother.⁴¹

Evoking national and historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Gautam Buddha, Kabir, Vinoba Bhave, and Jayaprakash Narayan in the context of the opposition to the Tehri dam, Bahuguna emphasizes the joys of simple living: fulfilment can never be achieved by projects, material progress, and the accumulation of wealth. Our ancestors had put a limit on desires. By following their sage advice, we may bring into existence a *sanskritik samaj*. This will represent an evolution from nature to culture (*prakriti* to *sanskriti*), a long-cherished dream of humankind.⁴²

The Evolution of the Tehri Dam

Irrigation planning was high on the agenda of the Indian government after 1947. By 1979 the country had 1554 big dams, mostly constructed after Independence, with a financial outlay of nearly Rs 70,000 crore allocated to irrigation. Of these, UP had 84: 1 built prior to 1900, 22 over 1901–51, 49 completed over 1952–79, and 12 more under construction.⁴³ Among them, the Tehri dam was the most ambitious—one of the highest dams in the world, meant to harness the waters of two important Himalayan rivers, the Bhagirathi and

⁴¹ Sunderlal Bahuguna with George James, *In Conversation*, Amritsar, All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, 2005.

⁴² Bahuguna, *Dharti ki Pukar*.

⁴³ Satyajit Singh, *Taming the Waters: The Political Economy of Large Dams in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 55–99.

Bhilangana.⁴⁴ This dam takes advantage of the sheer drop in height at many points along the course of the rivers for hydel electricity generation. This is part of a larger plan, formulated for tapping the discharge of the Upper Ganga Basin, wherein some 7400 million cubic metres of water is said to be 'going waste'. This plan envisages three storage schemes, namely, a reservoir on the Bhagirathi at Tehri, another at Kotli Bhel a little downstream, and a third at Utyasu on the Alaknanda (the other tributary of the Ganga).

The project was conceived in 1949 by the Geological Survey of India. The Tehri site was earmarked for consideration, subject to approval if the sub-surface investigations did not reveal adverse factors. Detailed investigations were carried out only much later, in 1963. Two years later, following the visit of K.L. Rao, then union minister for irrigation and power, the site was declared selected. The dam was commissioned in 1972, but work began only in 1978. The dam is finally expected to be 260.5 metres high. It will impound 3.22 million cubic metres of water. The reservoir extends up to 45 kilometres in the Bhagirathi valley and 25 kilometres in the Bhilangana valley, with a water spread area of 42.5 square kilometres. The reservoir is expected to irrigate 270,000 hectares of land and generate 346 MW of hydel power. The turbines in the powerhouse at Tehri have an installed capacity of 1000 MW, said to be enough to meet the peak power requirements of the UP power grid. However, peaking cannot be allowed unless fluctuations in the river discharges are balanced by some storage scheme. Therefore, a balancing reservoir at Koteswar, 22 kilometres downstream from Tehri, will be built and the dam will get an additional installed capacity of 400 MW. The Tehri dam is also expected to supply 500 cusecs of drinking water to Delhi. The

⁴⁴ Many reports and booklets are available, at both official and unofficial levels, which give information on the Tehri dam. For example, *Multipurpose and Hydroelectric Projects in Ganga and Yamuna Valleys*, UP, Lucknow, Irrigation Department (UP), May 1986; Rahul Sen, *Tehri Dam: A Fact Sheet*, New Delhi, South-South Solidarity, 1995; Yashpal Singh, *Tehri Bandh Pariyojana ki Byatha-Katha* (A Story of the Pain of the Tehri Dam Project), Rishikesh, 1992; Yashpal Singh, *Tehri Bandh Pariyojana: Vivad evam Iathya* (Tehri Dam Project: Debate and Facts), Rishikesh, 1992.

dam submergence area includes Tehri town and 23 villages in the vicinity, while 72 other villages are partially submerged. Nearly 5200 hectares of land, including 1600 hectares of cultivable land, is lost to the reservoir. About 85,000 people have been entirely or partially displaced because of the dam.⁴⁵ Irregularities, gaps, and injustices in the rehabilitation process have been reported widely by activists, organizations, and the media.⁴⁶

Opposition to the Tehri Dam

Tehri bandh ki denei char.

*atyachar, begharbar, bhrastachar, narsamhar*⁴⁷

(The four gifts of the Tehri dam: atrocity, displacement, corruption, and genocide)

Ever flowing from Gaumukh Himalaya

O! Mother! Bhagwati your name

The saints ever chant at Gangotri

From the lotus feet of Vishnu you issue

To disappear in the forest like locks of Shiva . . .

I am your undeserving son but you are my very own Mother.⁴⁸

The Tehri dam has witnessed continuous questioning and protests of numerous kinds by various people, including Bahuguna. His mission has been to stop construction of the dam by living at the dam site

⁴⁵ There are several reports on submergence, displacement, and rehabilitation. See Harishchandra Chandola, 'Dubta Hamara Sahar' (Our City is Drowning), *Pahar*, no. 12, pp. 265–8; Kushal P.S. Yadav, 'Going Under', *Down to Earth*, 15 January 2002, pp. 21–4.

⁴⁶ *Tehri Bandh: Bolti Khabre/Aankre* (Tehri Dam: Revealing News/Statistics), Tehri, Matu, n.d. This is a collection of several newspaper reports and articles that expose the shortcomings and injustices of rehabilitation.

⁴⁷ Slogan written at the Tehri dam project site that I saw during my fieldwork in June 1995.

⁴⁸ This is a Ganga *stuti*, written by the famous Garhwali poet Ghan-shyam Sailani. It was regularly recited at the dharna site during the agitation against the dam in 2000.

and sporadically fasting against it.⁴⁹ In the wake of Chipko, this opposition coincided with a period when organized opposition to big new projects was gathering force in the early 1970s, with movements emerging independently in different parts of the country.⁵⁰ The anti-Tehri dam movement has been seen as a part of the social movements of the 1970s, adding an ecological dimension to popular oppositional movements. A series of these were transforming the passive environmental consciousness of people into organized struggles. Chipko, Tehri, Silent Valley, and the fish workers' struggles were some of the prominent environmental movements of the decade.⁵¹ The Tehri movement was in particular seen as demonstrating the growth of grassroots mobilization, the forging of transnational links among rapidly proliferating big-dam opponents around the world, and the growing domestic institutionalization of globalizing norms which legitimized critiques of big dams.⁵² Silent Valley, Ichampalli, Koel Karo, Tehri, and Narmada became collectively synonymous with peoples' struggles at a time when all large infrastructure projects in the water and power sectors generated political resistance as well as intellectual criticism over the ways resources are used and justified.⁵³ An unusually heavy monsoon in 1970 and a devastating flood in the Alaknanda valley, coupled with discontent against the likely impact of large dams projected for the region, became anchoring points for the Tehri dam opposition. The

⁴⁹ For a detailed account of these many protests, petitions, committees, see Anil Agarwal, Sunita Narain, and Srabani Sen (eds), *State of India's Environment, The Citizens' Fifth Report, Part I: National Overview*, New Delhi, CSE, 1999, pp. 145–9. Also, *Update from Delhi*, New Delhi, Update Collective, n.d.

⁵⁰ Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, 1995, Penguin Books, p. 72.

⁵¹ Somen Chakraborty, 'The Silent Valley Movement', in Sebasti L. Raj and Arundhati Roy Choudhury (eds), *Contemporary Social Movements in India: Achievements and Hurdles*, New Delhi, 1998, Indian Social Institute, p. 186.

⁵² Sanjeev Khagram, *Dam and Development: Transnational Struggles for Water and Power*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 43.

⁵³ Ranjit Dwivedi, *Conflict and Collective Action: The Sardar Sarovar Project in India*, London, Routledge, 2006, p.1.

Vishnu Prayag Hydel Project, situated in the upper reaches of the Alaknanda river, and the barrage to be constructed between Lambagh and Hanumanchatti to generate 262 MW of electricity, were also opposed by environmentalists such as Chandi Prasad Bhatt. Frequent landslides, the construction of roads, and earthquakes were becoming issues of concern and action in the region.⁵⁴

In this context, the Tehri opposition tried to establish connections between ecological, social, and mythical values through scientific studies, environmental campaigns, and cultural-religious references, thus engaging a wide gamut of environmental politics. They emphasized the economic life and structure of the dam, its geology and seismicity, displacement and rehabilitation, costs and benefits. They talked about the cultural and religious values of the river Ganga and the Himalayan region. They attempted to use scientific knowledge to explain their perceptions of imaginative and emotional truths. They went on fasts, dharnas, demonstrations, and agitational programmes to focus their demands. They were speaking a language of ecological politics, the universal language of the anti-big-dam movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

However, by invoking certain metaphors, myths, emotions, and faith, and by reaching out to particular religious sections and their practices, these environmentalists came close in their worldview to Hindu nationalist forces and their communal agenda, and this happened at a crucial political juncture. In effect, the metaphor and myth acted as Trojan horses through which communal politics regularly entered and re-entered Green politics. For the anti-dam forces—and especially the face of Sunderlal Bahuguna which represented them—the politics of the anti-Tehri dam movement became a ‘normal’ collaborative relationship between the factual, environmental, natural, and sustainable on the one hand, and the religious, emotional, national, and Hindu on the other. It was this emotional and communal content, rather than any other aspect of environmentalism, which changed

⁵⁴ Chandi Prasad Bhatt, *The Future of Large Projects in the Himalaya*, Nainital, Pahar, 1992; Lok Soochna evam Sahayta Kendra, *The Calamity-Prone Central Himalayas*, Chamoli, 1998; Chandi Prasad Bhatt, *Meddling with Himalaya—Based on Incomplete Knowledge and Unfounded Belief—Disastrous*, n.d.

the form and the function of the movement against the Tehri dam in its final stage.

There are vivid accounts of the long journey of the opposition to the Tehri dam. The TBVSS was formed in the early 1970s under the presidentship of the veteran freedom fighter and local MLA Virendra Dutta Saklani. Saklani took upon himself the painstaking task of acquiring reports pertaining to the dam construction, making a thorough study of different aspects of the project, inviting acknowledged experts from relevant disciplines to visit the project site and offer their opinions, compiling voluminous documents and petitions, and mobilizing people to educate them about the risks and dangers of the project. Thus, when officers of the UP government arrived with engineers to inaugurate the construction of the first diversion tunnel of the dam in early 1978, thousands of men, women, and children blocked their way. Saklani was arrested along with many others, and the town of Tehri was converted into a police cantonment.⁵⁵

With the active participation of anti-liquor movement activist Kadambari Devi, Sunderlal Bahuguna, and others, the Samiti collected 10,000 signatures for a petition submitted to the Parliament's Petition Committee. Those who signed the writ petition filed in the Supreme Court of India against the dam included the CPI district secretary Vidya Sagar, Samiti president Saklani, and Sunderlal Bahuguna. Later, two prominent non-governmental organizations, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and the World Wildlife Fund-India (WWF-India), also became signatories to the writ petition. And two of the country's eminent lawyers, Soli Sorabji and Fali Nariman, agreed to appear on behalf of INTACH and WWF-India respectively.

Through appeals to the national political leaders of diverse affiliations and the central government, the Samiti and Sunderlal Bahuguna forced the state to constitute several committees and managed to officially halt or slow down the dam project many times. The prime

⁵⁵ Sunderlal Bahuguna, 'Tehri Dam: A Blueprint for Disaster', in Rigzen (ed.), *Fire in the Heart*, pp. 84–5.

minister, Indira Gandhi, took up the petition submitted to the parliament committee and set up a committee under S.K. Roy. In March 1980 the Roy committee lamented the lack of sufficient scientific data for definite conclusions on the geological and seismological aspects of building a dam. The group therefore deputed the Wadia Institute, Dehradun, the National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad, and Roorkee University to conduct studies. The group was critical of the lack of attention paid to environmental considerations, and to the arbitrary ousting and dislocation of populations. There were, however, differences of opinion within the working group.

After the Roy committee submitted its report in 1986, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) recommended abandoning the project, and the pace of work on the dam slowed. Although the project was not formally abandoned, no central funds were made available and the UP government provided only sustenance funds. However, in 1986 itself the USSR's president Mikhail Gorbachev visited Delhi and his visit paved the way for an agreement to the effect that the erstwhile USSR would underwrite Rs 1800 crore out of a total Rs 3000 crore credit. In June 1987 a collaboration agreement was signed in Moscow under which the Soviet Union was to render technical assistance in building the dam. The Tehri Hydroelectric Development Corporation, a public sector undertaking, was set up in 1988, in which the centre had a 75 per cent and the state government a 25 per cent financial commitment. In 1993 a Russian-Uzbek consortium offered to finance the project.

In light of an earthquake in 1991 in the upper Bhagirathi valley, another five-member team of earthquake experts was appointed. They overruled the Roy committee's recommendations. Consequently, the MoEF granted the project conditional clearance. Sunderlal Bahuguna alleged that certain conditions had not been fulfilled and went on a hunger strike in 1992. On the 45th day of his fast the prime minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, promised to review the project. The same year the environment minister, Kamal Nath, told the Lok Sabha that the centre was seriously considering withdrawal of environmental clearance to the project. However, with the prime minister's go-ahead, construction work on the project resumed in 1995. After yet another

long fast in January 1995 Bahuguna was promised an emergency review committee, but later arrested and taken to a hospital. Narasimha Rao's promise was never kept and the report of an expert group appointed by yet another prime minister, Deve Gowda, to examine the safety and environmental aspects of the dam never saw the light of day. Therefore, Bahuguna went on a hunger strike once again in October 1997. After 56 days of his fast one more prime minister, I.K. Gujral, ordered a ban on rock blasting and the movement of vehicular traffic at the dam site. In 1997, a panel headed by the economist Hanumantha Rao submitted its report on rehabilitation and suggested major changes in policy. In 1999 the Chamoli area was hit by an earthquake which once again cast doubt on the dam. A committee of secretaries was constituted: this showed a green light to the dam. In April 2001 the government came up with yet another committee, the Murli Manohar Joshi Committee, but nothing came of it.

Other than government-appointed committees and their recommendations, Sunderlal Bahuguna's fasts in 1992, 1995, 1997, and 2001 became the main rallying point for the opposition to the Tehri dam. Fasts and *vratas* were the truly *satvik* (righteous) methods to solve the complex problems of our society, which were developed by our ancestors in the course of their researches on the science of *atma gyan* (knowledge of the inner self)—this is how Bahuguna described his strategy against the dam.⁵⁶ Those involved in the struggle have had other and varying visions; the controversy, after all, involved a complex set of issues and a multiplicity of stakeholders. No wonder these stakeholders often had divergent perceptions of development, facts, problems, solutions, and costs and benefits. However, as I suggest below, these divergent positions, values, and beliefs were simplified and narrowed down—a process best personified in the words and deeds of Bahuguna and the groups associated with him. This served to obscure many other fundamental arguments against the dam, even as the simplified and narrowed positions coexisted with conservative ideas and values.

⁵⁶ Interview with Sunderlal Bahuguna, Tehri, 20 June 2001.

The Ecological Discourse and the Tehri Dam

Within the growing environmental consciousness of the 1970s an important and popular impulse was to use facts and figures, scientific methods and techniques, to challenge a project that claimed to be based on scientific calculation and assessment. The concern with reason and measurement, data and cost calculation was like a social enterprise and found expression not only in the setting up in 1978 of the TBVSS and its various campaigns, but also in studies, research papers, and articles. The Samiti and these varied expressions took upon themselves the painstaking task of making a thorough study of every aspect of the project report, visiting the project site, offering objective and scientific opinion, and compiling voluminous documents and petitions.

Through an analysis of technical, social, and environmental variables,⁵⁷ it was argued, that the economic life of the dam would not exceed 61.4 years, and that it would take at least another 50 years to yield the desired outcomes, by which time the reservoir would quite possibly be substantially silted. The design of the dam was arguably unsafe and, therefore, justified the fears of local Garhwalis around Tehri of the possibility of its catastrophic collapse. While calculating the benefit–cost ratio of the irrigation component of the project, the project authorities had committed conceptual errors and the revised benefit–cost ratio was 1.28 as against 3.49 reported by the project authorities. Numerous lacunae in the project formulation were also pointed out. Renowned scientists, such as Vinod K. Gaur, asked many questions: what was the probability of an occurrence of a major earthquake, of magnitude 7.5 or greater, whose rupture zone may traverse the Tehri region during the lifetime of the dam, that is, over the next ten years? What would be the effect of a large reservoir, if it were near-critically stressed, in inducing rock failure in the region? Bahuguna pleaded for the more human aspect: safeguarding the interests of people who were being uprooted and made permanent

⁵⁷ Vijay Paranipye, *Evaluating the Tehri Dam: An Extended Cost Benefit Appraisal*, New Delhi, INTACH, 1988, pp. 43–138.

oustees. Journalist and writer Bharat Dogra spoke of data deficiency: how the absence of data on soil erosion, slope stability characteristics in the catchment, and knowledge of landslides could have serious ramifications in understanding the potential problem posed by the dam.⁵⁸ The ones most likely to ensue have been identified as land alienation, destitution, inequality, forced changes in the agricultural pattern, havoc to the joint family system, the lack of village commons, and impaired educational and health facilities.⁵⁹ Beyond these there has been an informed discussion on the special susceptibility of the entire Himalayan range: that the Himalayas, being the youngest mountain ranges, pose serious geological hazards for the siting of an engineering project of this scale.⁶⁰

The Aesthetic Impulse

Environmental politics against big projects is often also about the perseverance and pursuit of the 'natural' and the 'beautiful'. Aesthetic issues revolve around the depiction of what is pristine and heavenly at the project site, and what constitutes natural and harmonious living. This has been an important part of the criticism of big dams. In Tehri

⁵⁸ *The Tehri Dam: A Prescription for Disaster*, New Delhi, INTACH, 1987. This is a selection of writings by well-known environmentalists, scientists, academics, and journalists on the Tehri dam project. There are many more books and booklets like this. For example, a booklet *A Note on Tehri Dam*, by S.P. Nautiyal, ex-Director General of the Geological Survey of India, published by TBVSS, suggests after a thorough study that alternative proposals should be considered. Also see V.D. Saklani, *Tehri Dam: A Dangerous Venture*, Tehri Garhwal, TBVSS, 1980; Bharat Dogra, *A Colossal Risk: Social, Ecological and Safety Aspects of Tehri Dam (and other Large Dam Projects in Himalayan Region)*, New Delhi, Social Change Papers, 1990.

⁵⁹ *Rehabilitation of Tehri Dam Outees: Promises and Performance*, Lucknow, UP Voluntary Health Association, 1996, pp. 1–13. Bharat Dogra, *Tehri Bandh Pariyojana: Vikas Chahiye, Vinash Nahin* (Tehri Dam Project: We need Development, not Destruction), Social Change Papers, New Delhi, 1990.

⁶⁰ Virendra Paneuli, 'Tehri Bandh: Lagat-Munaf-e-tatha Punarwaas-Muawze ki Asliyat' (Tehri Dam: The Reality of Cost-Benefits and Rehabilitation-Compensation), *Puhar*, no. 2, pp. 58–72. Also see Dogra, *Tehri Bandh Pariyojana*.

both the region and the project site have been most frequently referred to as sacred, peaceful, and solitary. The Himalayan region and the Ganga, symbols of a divine force, are a thing of beauty and points of contact with the infinite. This landscape appears on the canvas of environmentalists regularly, though it is not necessarily associated with mythical religious figures and symbols. Thus, during his 'prayerful fast' against the dam in October 1997, Bahuguna concludes one of his letters with these words: 'Sitting on the lap of Mother Bhagirathi with the inspiring sight of her murmuring flow, a holy dip and drinking her nectar-like water, gives me a unique pleasure. I have the desire to enjoy it until the last breath.'⁶¹ The landscapes are also given meaning, shape, and form with reference to people. For the anti-dam activists, sublime dignity lies in local people's contact with and love of their environment. In a vivid description, Swami Chidananda Saraswati, an active figure in the anti-Tehri dam agitation and whom Bahuguna considers his mentor, explains: 'The Himalayan region is a sacred region. Here people come in contact with the Supreme. For their self-realization, for their knowledge, they come to this peaceful region . . . Himalaya is your father. You have taken birth there. You have grown up in His lap and will remain there for the whole of your life. All that you get there will be your source of livelihood. Your land, your trees and garden, all come from there.'⁶²

Similarly, there are examples of the beauty of the Ganga becoming a major source of protest against the dam, with pictorial and highly emotional representations of the river being also a way of presenting the politics of the anti-dam activists. According to Saklani: 'Even the murmuring of the word "Ganga" fills us with a splendid fragrance. Tides of emotion flow. From times without number, India's people have sung songs in praise of the river.'⁶³ There are poems on her, such as: 'Flowing, like a divine girl, singing songs, we see many colours,

⁶¹ A letter by Sunderlal Bahuguna, 2 October 1997, Ganga Himalaya Kuti, Tehri. Also see Sunderlal Bahuguna, *The Himalayan Threat*, Tehri, n.d., pp. 1–2.

⁶² Swami Chidananda Saraswati, *Himalaya ke Paryavaran ki Raksha Kijiye* (Save the Himalayan Environment), Tehri, TBVSS, n.d., pp. 2–3.

⁶³ Virendra Dutta Saklani, *Gangajee ke Pavitra Jal ko Apavitra Karne ki Yojana*

many faces of her, she continues to flow.’⁶⁴ This aesthetic impulse has echoed throughout the period of the anti-dam movement. However, it has had a marginal importance. Hindu myths and faiths have not been the central elements of this aesthetic sensibility; nature and its contours provided both confirmation and affirmation of individual and collective concerns, of the need to appreciate beauty and fight for it.

Creating the Past

Myths of a glorious past are another important metaphor in the anti-Tehri dam movement. In the land of rivers and hills, a fertile, peaceful region is metaphorically carved out. The narrative oscillates between two poles: at one end, the focus is on a place of greatness and sacredness; at the other, its people, families, society, and work situations are shown to be ideal. The central importance of the past is explained in unequivocal terms. Kameshwar Prasad Bahuguna says: ‘This is not only a question of drowning or displacing. It is a question of being attached with one’s self and honour. It is a question of preserving our cultural heritage, to save the Ganga water from being poisoned. It is a question of being attached with our past.’⁶⁵ This past has a long history, a history which is evoked beyond all sense of time and place. Sunderlal Bahuguna says, ‘It has a long history. Its roots are in the forest culture of India. Our *rishi-munis* lived in ashrams within the forests. There were forests everywhere. In this environment, they got a new vision of life.’⁶⁶ This history has some variations—as a place of mythical figures, as a place of healthy and happy people, as a place of

(A Project to Convert Holy Ganga Water to Unholy), Tehri, TBVSS, 1980, p.1.

⁶⁴ Trilokchand Papne, ‘Saswat Bahane Do (Let it Flow Eternal), in Saklani, *Gangajee ke Pavitra Jal*, pp.16–22.

⁶⁵ Kameshwar Prasad Bahuguna, ‘Tehri Bandh ka Virodh Kyon?’ (Why Protest the Tehri Dam?), *Himalaya: Man and Nature*, vol. xv, nos 7–8, December 1991–January 1992, p. 12.

⁶⁶ Sunderlal Bahuguna, ‘Jeewan ki Jai, Mirtu ka Ksay’ (Hail Life, Condemn Death), *Chipko Sandesh*, Chipko Suchana Kendra, 1989, pp. 25–6.

one's ultimate being and living. Bahuguna narrates an idea of Garhwal about a century earlier: 'Every member of the family was busy. There was so much work related to agriculture and cattle-rearing that none in the family could sit idle. There was too much work for the menfolk. Men spent their night in thatches. In winter they had to be involved in making fences on the farm and expanding the agriculture. Life was busy, people were happy. Their world was limited to their land and cattle. Families lived with each other to make their lives happy and prosperous.'⁶⁷ Sometimes, the past includes concrete, earthy references. The past and the history become images of people's achievements: 'Tehri is no ordinary town; it is a historic town of cultural importance, which after the division of Garhwal in the early nineteenth century, became the centre of Garhwali culture. It has produced eminent Garhwali poets like Satya Sharan, Chandra Mohan Raturi and Tota Krishna Gairola, scholars like Rao Virendra Shah, art critics like Barrister Mukandilal and the famous sculptor Avtar Singh Panwar. Tehri has been the place of penance of the famous Vedantic saint Swami Ram Tirtha.'⁶⁸ In all these ways, the metaphors in the anti-dam movement have involved creating a past and its history from within the local environment. The forest, the river, the mountains become dominant in the narration and contain the possibility of varied justifications for protest. Such a past, created on the basis of local theology and myths, is then also deployed for the ecological dimensions of the movement.

The Tehri Dam and the Nation

For the state and the pro-dam people, nation and nation-building have been intimately related to completing the dam.⁶⁹ Ironically, for the environmentalists and the anti-dam activists national security,

⁶⁷ Sunderlal Bahuguna, 'Parvatiya Vikas aur Bhoomi Upyog' (Hill Development and Land Utilization), *Chipko Sandesh*, pp. 15–17.

⁶⁸ Sunderlal Bahuguna, 'The Humanitarian Aspect', in *The Tehri Dam: A Prescription for Disaster*, p. 36.

⁶⁹ Singh, *Tehri Bandh Pariyojana: Vivad evam Tathya*, p. 61; Singh, *Tehri Bandh Pariyojana ki Byaytha-Katha*, p. 14. He forcefully argues that the Tehri

the national interest, and national unity are no less important. Bahuguna and other prominent anti-dam activists have throughout emphasized that a safe and secure nation, free of external threat, will emerge from the water and the forests. The enemy and a threat perception occupy special places in their environmental identity. There is a recognition that these catchwords and universally acknowledged valorizations of the nation and its unity and integrity must be invoked to impart credibility and acceptability to their environmental message. This threat perception to the nation, however, never remains fixed; it is always in a flux. Sometimes Bahuguna is worried about the whole Himalayan region. He cautions: 'The threat from the Himalayas is to the security of the nation. Himalaya at one time was the abode of peace, where sages and saints did penance . . . The most expensive item of expenditure in this region is the guarding of Himalayan borders . . . China has adopted a clever strategy of defence in Tibet, adjacent to its borders with India, Bhutan, and Nepal. China has settled its soldiers, married to Tibetan women, as farmers and cattle herdsman in this region.'⁷⁰ His worries take another shape when he presents a memorandum to the Parliamentary Standing Committee during its visit to Tehri to evaluate the Tehri dam project: 'Another threat to the safety of the dam is from the defence angle. At least three ex-Army officers, Major General Bhuvan Chandra Khanduri, ex-MP, Sri Ranjit Singh, ex-MP, and Air-Commodore R.S. Bishnoi have indicated that this dam is in the missile range of neighbouring countries.'⁷¹

The threat perception goes around. Many other social activists and concerned people and organizations start raising it. Rajendra Singh

dam is beneficial for the nation and to stop it would adversely affect the national interest and nation-building.

⁷⁰ Bahuguna, *The Himalayan Threat*, p. 4.

⁷¹ Sunderlal Bahuguna, *Himalayan Policy Solution to Tehri Dam Problems*, Tehri, 1997, p. 5. Also see, Rajeev Nayan Bahuguna, *Ghayaal Himalaya ki Pira* (The Pain of a Wounded Himalaya), Amritsar, All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, 1999, p. 1. A known activist in the anti-Tehri dam movement, Rajeev explains how, from Kohima to Kashmir, the Himalaya is engulfed by violence. He asks: if it continues to be wounded by internal attacks, how will it withstand external attacks?

Dhotiyal, advocate and convenor of the Jan Jagaran Manch, says, 'The Tehri dam can be fatal from the viewpoint of national security. The dam is at an air distance of 100 kilometres from China. If there is an Indo-China war, this dam will be the target of attack by Chinese missiles.'⁷² Even an extended cost-benefit appraisal of the Tehri dam finds it necessary to mention this: 'An important aspect of the Tehri dam is its proximity to the Chinese border. We cannot ignore the fact that at present China is an unfriendly neighbour, and that the Tehri dam might be an attractive target for Chinese bombers.'⁷³

Environmentalists argue that a dam on the Ganga-Bhagirathi constitutes a kind of leave-taking from the country, a loss of national unity and integrity whereby the nation loses its character: 'Bhagirathi binds the whole country into one unit';⁷⁴ 'Ganga is most important from the point-of-view of national integrity, cultural unity and the oneness of India';⁷⁵ 'Ganga is not only a holy river, but is most important for national integrity and for cultural unity and the oneness of our nation';⁷⁶ and so on. If the pro-dam people see the construction of the dam as an important marker for the creation of a national landscape, the environmentalists, equally, see the preservation of a pristine Indian ecological landscape, free of the dam, as true nationalism.

Holy Mother Ganga and the Tehri Dam

The shadow of mythical accounts, traditional values, and ancient beliefs abounds in most varieties of environmental politics. There is an identification of people with plants and animals—in other contexts,

⁷² Rajendra Singh Dhotiyal, *Vikas ka Pratik Tehri Bandh?: Kuch Prashna—Javab Desh Hit mein Abhisht* (Tehri Dam Symbol of Development? Some Questions: Answers Desirable in the National Interests), Tehri, n.d., p. 4.

⁷³ Paranjpye, *Evaluating the Tehri Dam*, p. 10.

⁷⁴ Sunderlal Bahuguna, *Save Himalayas, Soil, Water and Pure Air*, Amritsar, All India Pingalwara Society, 1995, p. 34.

⁷⁵ Sunderlal Bahuguna, 'Save Mother Ganga', *Manthan*, vol. xviii, no. 3, July–September 1997, pp. 33–7.

⁷⁶ Swami Chidananda, 'An Appeal to Save the Holy Ganga', *Himalaya: Man and Nature*, vol. xv, no. 4, September 1991, p. 1.

the emblems of whales, seals, and pandas are common. There is also a feeling that people belong to particular places, which they express as a cosmic relatedness that runs deeper than familial and ancestral solidarity.⁷⁷ In the vocabulary of environmentalism there are always holy lands and rivers, sacred groves and forests.⁷⁸ In effect, such environmentalist mythologizing moves at will through a vast cultural treasure-house, its shelves loaded with beliefs and practices from the past. Here, it is apparent that what distinguishes Green from Saffron lies in the elements of the past that they choose for their myth-making, the sorts of meanings they extract from their myths, and the political uses to which they put these myths.

What these mythologies seek to achieve is a new union between man and nature by the integration of two divergent traditions: on the one hand the technological and scientific, and on the other the mythical and imaginative. This fusion takes varied and interesting ecological forms. The Himalaya and the Ganga have a greater role in India's environmental politics of India and in the making of a national identity than any other topographical features. The Himalaya and the Ganga are physical entities, true, but they have also been culturally re-created by being endowed with a variety of meanings. In the anti-Tehri dam movement, environmentalists as well as religious leaders

⁷⁷ It is explained in a different context that autochthonic beliefs, associated with the possessive symbolism of the cavern in the religion of palaeolithic hunter-gatherers and later with the worship of the Earth Mother, led the Romans to call a bastard *terrae filius*—son of the earth—and to the widespread folk custom of giving birth on the soil: hence the expression 'native soil'. They also clearly share some form of psychological ancestry with the growing assertion of local, regional, and ethnic identities, the search for roots, and a sense of belonging. For details, see David Nicholson-Lord, *The Greening of the Cities*, London and New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, pp. 38–55.

⁷⁸ Sacred groves are said to be one of the finest instances of traditional conservation practices. They are identified with wild woodland spirits and deities of pre-Brahminic societies and with the gods of the Hindu pantheon. This has resulted in the installation of the idols of Hindu gods in such groves. For details, see Madhav Gadgil and M.D. Subash Chandran, 'Sacred Groves', in Geeti Sen (ed.), *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India—Attitudes to the Environment*, Delhi, Sage & IIC, 1992, p. 187.

have opted for a Hinduized cultural representation of the Ganga and the Himalaya; this representation is dominant and has become an essential part of the movement's environmental politics and identity. Especially in the later years of the movement, anti-Tehri dam views have been constructed using Hindu imagery, often partnering Hindutva politics. Such ecological reasoning is fuzzy, going beyond logic, eliciting Hindu support, patriotism, and xenophobia.

This religio-cultural creation of the Himalaya and the Ganga is a result of the combination of several features: Hindu religious and social values; the supposed holiness and purity of the Ganga's water; the river's great economic and practical significance; the holy places, temple complexes, and *rishi-munis* at vantage points along its banks. The Ganga stems from some ancient golden period and flows into the nationalist one. The voices of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as well as obscure sadhus float and mingle in it. Sometimes, as in Bahuguna's views, the main reason for the Tehri dam issue remaining unresolved is blamed on the fact that the river is viewed in isolation by the dam builders, instead of being seen in the context of the Himalaya as a mountain range—the source of economic prosperity, ecological security, and spiritual inspiration to a billion Indians.⁷⁹ Pamphleteering in the form of 'Ganga Abhiyan' emphasizes the rich topography of the Himalaya and the Ganga as conjoined features of a single region, offers information on the ill-effects of the dam, and denounces the dam's consequences.⁸⁰ Occasionally, we are referred to the will and testament of Jawaharlal Nehru:

The belief among the Hindus about the holiness of the Ganga is so strong that every Hindu wishes his ashes to be immersed in it. The popular feelings about the Ganga have been very aptly put in words by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his last will and testament: 'The Ganga especially, is the river of India, beloved of her people, around which are intertwined her racial memories, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and defeats' . . . If we leave aside the Ganga and the Himalaya, nothing will remain of the high values we cherish.

⁷⁹ Bahuguna, *Himalayan Policy Solution to Tehri Dam Problems*, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁰ *Ganga Abhiyan*, a two-page pamphlet by TBVSS, Delhi, n.d.

All the preachers of India from Vyas Dev to Mahatma Gandhi took inspiration from the Ganga and the Himalaya. Shankaracharya, Guru Nanakdev, Tulsidas, Maharshi Dayanand and Vivekanand came in between.⁸¹

In Chidananda's words, 'India is a holy land; and holiest of the holy and greatest of the great is the Himalaya, especially its Uttarakhand region. All our scriptures support this view. Uttarakhand is *devbhumi* (a place sanctified by Gods) and *tapobhumi* (a sacred land of penance and austerity) . . . A land of Gods, it is called. It makes its dwellers God-like.'⁸²

Other environmentalists deploy Hindu myths about the Ganga which integrate the identity of a river and a 'Hindu' country.⁸³ One myth goes thus: 'Bhagirath, through long and arduous prayers persuaded the holy Ganga to descend from heaven, to wet the ashes of his ancestors, so that they might then ascend to eternal heaven. Lord Brahma advised Bhagirath to ask Lord Shiva to receive Ganga as she descended, because the earth could not sustain her fall.'⁸⁴ Lord Shiva agreed to help bring down the holy Ganga, and by catching it in his tangled locks he saved the world from her impact. The story goes on to describe how before joining the sea the Ganga watered the mortal remains of King Sagar's 60,000 sons, liberating their souls once and forever. Another appeal makes it clear that the river is virtually the nation: 'The emotions created by her [Ganga] have integrated the nation into one. To wound this feeling would be most unfortunate for the Nation . . . We should not think of Holy Divine Mother Ganga

⁸¹ Bahuguna, *Save Ganga*, p. 1.

⁸² Swami Chidananda, 'Save the Himalaya', *Bhagirathi ki Pukar*, vol. 7, no. 2, February 1997, p. 1.

⁸³ Hindu mythology has it that the Ganga, oldest daughter of Himavat (Himalayas), was brought down from the heavens in the form of a river. Because of its descent from the heavens, Hindus regard the Ganga as the mother of all Indian rivers and as the purest, holiest, and most sacred stream of the world, and consider that a dip in it or the imbibing of its holy water will purge their sins and ensure their soul's liberation (*moksha*).

⁸⁴ 'Ganga: The Legend and the Life Line', *Himalaya: Man and Nature*, vol. xvi, no. 10, March 1993, p. 1.

in terms of kilowatts, in terms of hectares of irrigated land, or in terms of drinking water facility for any city . . . Ganga is not only a holy river, but is most important for national integrity and for cultural integrity and the oneness of our nation.'⁸⁵

The cultural creation that was hitherto a combination of several agencies overlapping with each other seemed to be culminating, especially in the 1990s, in a narrow, conservative environmental politics. The appeal to Hindus and their organizations became an important expression of the mood of the TBVSS—Sunderlal Bahuguna and his Himalaya Bachao Andolan—giving it an increasingly powerful political-cultural undertow. What the anti-Tehri dam agitation subscribes to is not only Hindu religious culture but also the conviction that only through the recovery of a Hindu religious platform can a successful case be made against the dam. The bond uniting the environmental and heterogeneous coalition of religious and political concerns has created the mainstream of the movement. Its targeted call is to arouse Hindus for a greater cause. The TBVSS appeals to *sadhus-sants* to stop a catastrophe:

The foreign powers are conspiring for the Tehri dam, to end the religion and tradition of the *Bharatbhoomi* . . . Tehri dam is the murder of our culture, religion, and tradition. Whenever there has been a crisis in our religion and culture, our *rishis* and *avatars* have protected us. This is such a moment of crisis . . . It is natural that India's highly respected Jagadguru Sankaracharyas, Mahamandaleshwars and thoughtful *sadhus-sants* are worried over the direct interference in our religion by the Tehri dam . . . *Parampujya Mahamandaleshwar Swami* Sri Yogeshwar Videhi Hari Jee Maharaj, President, Kumbh Mela Sadhu Samaj, has also appealed to the *sadhus-sants* to make people conscious in this hour of terrible national problem.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Chidananda, 'An Appeal to Save the Holy Ganga', p. 1.

⁸⁶ The material quoted has been taken from a pamphlet entitled *Tehri Bandh dwara Sarvanash ko Rokane ke liye Pujya Sadhu-Santo ka Aahwan* (A Call by Honoured Sadhus-Sants to Stop Destruction by the Tehri Dam), published by TBVSS. The pamphlet is released in the name of Virendra Dutta Saklani, President, Tehri, TBVSS, n.d.

टिहरी बांध द्वारा सर्वनाश को रोकने के लिए पूज्य साधु-संतों का आह्वान

परमपूज्य महाशिवरात्रि स्थायी श्री योगेश्वर विदेही हरि को महाराज, महाराज मुख्य कैलाश साधु महाराज निर्बंध पूज्य परिवार में टिहरी बांध रोक का निरोधन करने तथा हस्तक्षेप लोगों के चलो के उपरांत पूज्य साधु-संतों के आह्वान की कि वे देश को टिहरी बांध के सर्वनाश से बचाने के लिए हस्तक्षेप करने का वाक्य करें।

विदेही ऋण

सर्वपूज्य महा साधु श्री श्री योगेश्वर जी महाराज, तब से इस वाक्य पूज्य एवं जाने करण विदेही महाराज से भारत पुनः से कई एक परम्परा समस्त करने के लिए टिहरी बांध का बहाना बन रहा है। अर्थात् सरकार उन्नत बहाना में फल रूप, विकास की गति में समता की बोझा देकर देश को विदेही ऋण के दुबो रहा है। बलात्कार का रहा है कि ४ अरब रुपया व्यय हो चुका है, जिसमें से वास्तविक व्यय बहुत कम तथा बाकि का धन बर्बाद हुआ है। अनुमानतः वर्षों ४६ अरब रुपया और व्यय होगा, जिसपर भारत की प्रतिबंध करोड़ों रुपया केवल व्यय के रूप में देना होगा। "बाँट सबी लो सोत सबो, सब राख रहो को" कहावत के अनुसार देश की किच सबो राख सुरक्षित रखना ही बुद्धिवादी है।

देश एवं परम्परा को हत्या—

स्वाधीन की न कहा कि वह समस्त में नहीं जाता कि सरकार देश, विदेश के वैज्ञानिकों, सम्प्रदाय वैज्ञानिकों एवं विद्वान विचारकों समस्तों की मरणा को टकराते-हुये टिहरी बांध बनाकर सब, समृद्धि एवं परम्परा की हत्या करने पर सबो तुमों है। सब-२ वर्ष एवं परम्परा पर एकट भाषा सम-सब भाषा के पूज्य साधुओं तथा प्रवियों में उदा गुस्ता की। वह जो एक ऐसो हो सबो है।

बाँध तोड़ने एवं दूधने की सम्भावना—

टिहरी बांध की तोड़ने एवं बहकाव होने की सम्भावना निराकार नहीं है। इस क्षेत्र की पहाड़ियाँ वर्षों होने से समय-समय पर टूट कर भागो-रखी में गिरती रहती हैं। इस पू-स्थान तथा वैज्ञानिकों के अनुसार बाँध बाँध की दुर्घटनाओं में बड़ी-बड़ी दरार होने से इसमें बड़े भू-क्षय का घात बहुत न कर सबो पूज्य के हस्त में बाँध बहकाव टूट सकता है।

जमीन में हस्तक्षेप—

भारत के सर्वपूज्य अवलोकन मकराबाओ, महाशिवरात्रि एवं विचारकों साधु सन्तों का जब से इस क्षेत्रे हस्तक्षेप से चिन्तित होना स्वाभाविक है। इस बाँध से १—मनोको-व्यवस्था की बाँध बाँधो की वास्तविक वास्तविक बन होगी २—जीवजो का पावन जल बहा रहने से प्रभावित होगा। ३—मनोको से लेकर बसावावर तक के सबो लोको, बसिवरो एवं बाँधो की अवधि काँट होने में सब, समृद्धि एवं परम्परा के घात सम्भाव्य होते। परम पूज्य श्री रायसोय की महाराज के स्मारक रूप आयोः ४—सब पञ्च पद-पौधे सब; बड़ी-बूटिया मर रहेंगी। ५—सकम्पना बाँध दूधने या तोड़ने जाने के वैज्ञानिक एवं केन्द्र, मुनि-की-रती, एवं हरिद्वार मान्य तार्किक एवं दूधने तथा देश के बहुत बड़े पावन में बर्बाद होत होगी।

वतएव स्वाधीन की वे पूज्य साधु-संतों में विचार आह्वान की है कि वे इस सबकार राष्ट्रीय सम्पदा के लिए सब साधारण जंगल को वाक्य करें। तथा इस विनाशकारी बाँध को बाध कराने व सबसो साधुओं की वाक्य व पवित्रता को बहुत रक्षने के लिये हर हस्तक्षेप प्रवर्तन करें।

विनीत

(बिरेन्द्र दत्त सकलानी)

अध्यक्ष

टिहरी बाँध विरोधी संघर्ष समिति
टिहरी, नकुवाज

टिहरी बाँध विरोधी संघर्ष समिति द्वारा प्रचारित।

अरुण शिर्ष, समासाली रोड, टिहरी से सुविध।

Fig. 4.1: TBVSS's Appeal to Sadhus-Sants to Stop the Tehri Dam Construction

At the time of the Mahashivratri festival they go to *kawarias*—Hindus, who walk carrying Ganga water on their shoulders to pour it in their temple, or on Lord Shiva. The anti-Tehri activists address these travellers: "The free, holy flow of the mother Ganga is being disrupted

by constructing the Tehri dam and by establishing the industries. Is it not your pious, Hindu duty to oppose it? Awake devotees, it is the call of your God! Fulfil your duty to Mother Ganga! Never leave the opportunity to serve your God, your religion and your Mother Ganga!⁸⁷ A booklet, prepared and distributed by a social activist, says: 'Atheists, anti-religious people and anti-social elements are exploiting the Ganga and the Tehri dam is a classic example of all this . . . The Tehri dam will make it impossible for Hindus and the religious people to see the Ganga. The Hindus will not be able to perform the last rites of their ancestors.'⁸⁸

Sometimes popular stereotypes of the Muslim community are invoked to distinguish purity from pollutants. At the time of one of his fasts against the dam in 1996, Bahuguna is quoted thus in a report: 'Sample the story narrated by Bahuguna at one of his evening sermons. The environmentalist said Muslim emperor Aurangzeb refused water to his dying father, but "we Hindus" even offer water to the dead. The analogy by this "Gandhian" stunned two local Muslim women who silently walked out of the meeting even as the audience, including some VHP activists, burst into an applause.'⁸⁹ In a conversation he is reported as saying, 'The Hindus are praiseworthy. They give water to their dead. Oh Muslim! Are you so cruel that you cannot give water to your own father in jail?'⁹⁰ There is also an attempt to widen the political terrain of Hinduism in other ways: 'We should take initiatives for the preservation and beautification of Rameshwaram, Kanchi, Vraja (Mathura-Vrindavan), Kashi and Haridwar, to place an ideal before the entire Hindu community . . . To embrace the Vedic system of water conservation, according to our *tirth* tradition, can only

⁸⁷ *Kawarion se Appeal*, a pamphlet released jointly by the TBVSS and Shiv Kawar Sangh, Meerut, n.d. Another pamphlet of similar nature titled, *Dekh Raha hai Aaj Himalaya Ganga ke Rakhwalon ko* (The Himalaya is Watching Today the Saviours of Ganga), was also released by the Tehri, TBVSS, n.d.

⁸⁸ Prabhudayal Raturi, *Sri Ganga Jee ka Mahatya* (The Importance of Sri Ganga Jee), Tehri, 1996, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁹ V. Radhika, 'Bahuguna Plays the Hindu Card to Widen Support Base', *Pioneer*, Delhi, 12 June 1996, p. 7.

⁹⁰ Bahuguna with George James, *In Conversation*, p. 3.

कावड़ियों से अपील

प्यारे शिव भक्तों,

आप जानते हैं हम अपने पुरखों की शान्ति के लिए तथा उनके प्रति कृतज्ञता प्रकट करने हेतु भागीरथी का पवित्र जल अपने इष्ट देव भगवान शंकर को अर्पण करते हैं। हम घरती यां का स्पर्श करते हुए बाबा की भक्ति में मस्त बोल बम्ब-बोल बम्ब का जप घोष करने हुए गंगा जल को लाते हैं।

हम नहीं जानते कि आज इसी जल को कितना प्रदूषित किया जा रहा है। जिस जल के प्रति सभी प्राणी इतनी अधिक श्रद्धा भावना रखते हैं। जिस गंगा का ब्रह्मा जी के कमण्डल में निवास था। राजा भागीरथ ने उसे घरती पर उतारने के लिए कठोर तपस्या की, बाबा भोले ने गंगा जी का वेग घरती पर अपनी जटाओं में संभाला और हिमालय से सागर तक भागीरथ गंगा को लेकर गये। आज उसी गंगा मैया को टिहरी बांध में बांधकर और कारखाने लगाकर उसकी अविरल पवित्र धारा को रोका व प्रदूषित किया जा रहा है। क्या इसके प्रति हमारा कोई कर्तव्य नहीं? अपने बाबा की आवाज है, भक्तों उठो! गंगा मैया की सेवा में जुटो! बाबा की भक्ति तथा गंगा मैया की सेवा का मोका मत छोड़ो।

यह हमारी परीक्षा का समय है। आजो हम गंगा मैया की पवित्रता बनाये रखने के लिए एक जुट होकर सेवा करें। गंगा की पवित्र धारा को टिहरी बांध या अन्य बांध-बांधकर नहीं रोकने दें तथा गंगा मैया में कोई गन्दगी न डालें। ऐसा संकल्प लेने के लिए महाशिव रात्रि 25 फरवरी को "पूरा महादेव" पर एक बड़ा सम्मेलन होगा जिसमें सभी भाई-बहिन शामिल होंगे।

समय : 25 फरवरी दोपहर 12 बजे से सायं 6 बजे तक

"कैसे हो गंगा का रक्षण"

सम्मेलन

दोपहर 12 से सायं 6 बजे तक

विनीत :

शिव कावड़ संघ

शिव मन्दिर, ग्राम-पों० डौला

मेरठ (उत्तर-प्रदेश)

सम्मेलन स्थल

पूरा महादेवजी का मन्दिर

वाया बालेनी

जिला मेरठ

Fig. 4.2: TBVSS's Appeal to Kawarias

ensure pure and pious water to all the Indians . . . To re-establish the land's productivity, we must immediately implement the Vedic system of undisrupted flow of pious rivers.⁹¹

A Thing to Fear

Fears over the safety, geology, seismicity, hydrology, and other life and death risks involved in the construction of the dam are based on a comprehensive technical analysis of the project. The literature

⁹¹ A joint communique by the Rashtriya Tirth Chetna Sangh and TBVSS, 1996, pp. 1-2.

published by the TBVSS, Sunderlal Bahuguna, and others of this camp is full of references to this aspect. It is said that the mountains on which the Tehri dam is being built are criss-crossed with geological faults, that the region is seismically too active to situate such a large dam, that the dam is not designed to withstand the intensity of earthquakes which may strike the region, that such a high-risk project can place at great risk many cities and their population downstream of the dam: 'Should the Tehri dam ever collapse, the 700 billion gallons of water in the reservoir would crash down the river, towards the holy cities of Rishikesh and Haridwar, 50 miles or so away. The two cities have a combined population of 200,000, although on any given day 10,000 or more Hindu pilgrims are there too. Presumably, the flood would kill many people who had not already been killed by the quake itself.'⁹²

The basis of these fears is marked by a transition in the later period of the anti-dam movement. There are now wild imaginings and paranoia over the dam. Not geology, seismicity, hydrology, or earthquakes, but the Ganga turning into a *jheel* captures the mood. Contact with the dam is a contact with the worst social values. Family, morality, and the dignity of women are all now endangered. Fear becomes an environmental metaphor for the propagation of certain images and values. For Swami Chidananda Saraswati, saving the Ganga from the dam is like 'saving [it] from Ravan', for 'It [the dam] is a big giant, Ravan, who is going to eat us all.'⁹³ There are new reasons for opposition to the dam: 'Now the question arises: what if Ganga is turned into an artificial lake? What will be its impact on Ganga *jal*?'⁹⁴ To

⁹² Kathy A. Svitil, 'The Coming Himalayan Catastrophe', *Bhagirathi ki Pukar*, vol. 5, no. 8, October 1995, pp. 1–4. Also see K.N. Khattri, 'Perceptions of Seismic Hazard for the Tehri Dam', *Bhagirathi ki Pukar*, vol. 6, no. 2, February 1996, pp. 1–4; *Tehri Bandh? Vastvikta*, a booklet by Delhi Forum, pp. 6–10, n.d.; Rahul Sen, *Tehri Dam: A Fact Sheet*, Delhi, South-South Solidarity, 1995, pp. 9–31.

⁹³ Saraswati, *Ganga Maiya ko Bachana Hai*, p. 2. Also see Saraswati, *Himalaya ke Paryavaran ki Raksha Kijiye*, Tehri, p. 7. Here it is said that as the Himalaya and the Ganga are incarnations of Krishna, the construction of the Tehri dam implies hostility to Krishna.

⁹⁴ The fear of the Ganga turning into a lake is repeatedly mentioned by

this 'The answer is obvious. The purity of Ganga *jal* and her greatness will be destroyed.'⁹⁵ The tone of the opposition is new and changing: 'Will people of India, who chant the victory of Mother Ganga, silently and helplessly, like impotents, watch this horrible act?'⁹⁶ A consumer-centred culture will replace Hindu culture: this is yet another fear. 'Since ancient times, the Himalayan region has been calling upon peoples' consciousness for spiritual progress and cultural and natural beauty. . . The big dam will add to the growth of a particular tourism that induces consumerism. This will harm natural beauty and morality. Especially liquor and its attraction will hurt family life and the dignity of women.'⁹⁷

The RSS, the VHP, and the Tehri Dam

A notable feature of the RSS's and VHP's activities in the 1980s and 1990s was their active campaign against the Tehri dam and their subsequent alliance with Bahuguna. The latter also joined a delegation of the VHP against the Tehri dam in early 2000 and has at times positively evoked the VHP president Ashok Singhal's pledge to stop the murder of the Ganga by halting the Tehri dam.⁹⁸ The campaign

Sunderlal Bahuguna and others. See Sunderlal Bahuguna, 'Tehri Dam: Ab Tak', *Ganga Sandesh*, Amritsar, 1997, p. 34. Also, BJP Rajya Sabha MP Trilokinath Chaturvedi said this in his speech in parliament. See Trilokinath Chaturvedi, 'Nirmanadhin Tehri Bandh mein Bhukampiye Khatre aur Bhrastachar' (The Danger of Earthquakes and Corruption in the Under-construction Tehri Dam), *Ganga Sandesh*, Tehri, 1997, p. 1; Virendra Dutta Saklani, *Ganga Jee ke Pavitra Jal ko Apavitra Karne ki Yojana* (The Plan to Make Pure Ganga Water Impure), Tehri, 1980, pp. 4–5.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

⁹⁷ '13 April 1995 ko Tehri Garhwal ke Pratinidhiyo ki Baithak Mein Parit Prastav', *Himalaya: Man and Nature*, vol. xviii, no. 4, April–June 1995, p. 36. This worry is expressed in several writings. For example, see Sunderlal Bahuguna, untitled speech in *Ganga Sandesh*, Tehri, p. 17. Also, Virendra Dutta Saklani, 'Bhoomika', in Sunderlal Bahuguna, *Tehri ka Vishal Bandh* (Tehri's Huge Dam), Tehri, TBVSS, n.d., p. 1.

⁹⁸ Sunderlal Bahuguna, *Vikas aur Paryavaran*, Amritsar, All India Pingalwara Society, 2004, p. 33.

has been a mixture of Hindu faith and emotion, mythical beliefs and metaphors, concerns of national unity and integrity, constructions of a glorious past and a threatened present, and has culminated in a clarion call to all Hindus. Many references from the anti-Tehri dam movement have been culled to create not so much a fearful or threatened as an aggressive Hindu identity. In this version the Himalaya and Ganga's landscapes are haunted not only by an aggressive China but also by a Muslim Pakistan, a communist Russia, and a conspiring West who make war against Hindu Bharat and its culture. Myths about the Holy Mother Ganga take many forms, from the holiest and most motherly to the crisis-ridden maiden crying for help.

For Hindu nationalists the Ganga and the Tehri dam are conscious political constructions which embody beliefs, values, and information, and which influence events, behaviour, and perceptions. Their projections cover a wide field, from simple religious texts to imaginative accounts, from the river in danger to a community and country in danger. This school holds that holiness and the sacred must be obeyed as absolute commands beyond history and ideology. 'To understand Ganga, we need such minds and hearts that consider mythology more credible than history.'⁹⁹ Articles on the Ganga's pollution, purification, and cleanliness and the threat to these from the Tehri dam proliferate in various publications of the Hindu Right. 'Somebody must tell the Prime Minister of India that it is not enough to smear *bhasma* (ashes) on his forehead to show his religiosity and that he will gain greater status by cleaning up Ganga *mata* (Mother Ganga).'¹⁰⁰ There is a comprehensive detailing of promises made to the agitationists by successive governments and government-appointed committees, and a history of how they have been violated.¹⁰¹

When the VHP journeyed through this realm, it marked the anti-dam politics with its usual brand of aggression. Ashok Singhal, leader

⁹⁹ Vidya Niwas Mishra, *Desh Dharma aur Sahitya* (Country, Religion and Literature), Delhi, Radhakrishna Prakashan, 1992, p. 81.

¹⁰⁰ M.V. Kamath, 'The Polluted Ganga', *Organiser*, Delhi, 22 September 1996, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Pramod Kumar, 'Tehri Dam: Tinkering at the Ganga', *Organiser*, 24 September 1995, p. 7.

of the VHP, is militant on the subject: 'To us *Bharatvasis*, Ganga is no river; it is a deity . . . The human monsters that conceived the "damming" of the holy Ganga have displayed a monumental insensitivity to the very soul of Bharat. The VHP had launched Ganga *yatras* to every village and city of this vast country . . . The intensity of love and faith with which Ganga *jal* was revered during the *yatras* by every son and daughter of this soil transcending all barriers of caste, creed and religion is our precious treasure . . . The enemies of Hindu heritage and Hindu *sanskriti* seem determined to destroy the Ganga in the name of progress, disguised in the garb of the Tehri dam.'¹⁰²

The rhetoric was more than sufficiently supplemented by activities on the ground. In 1995 the VHP organized a pilgrimage, the Ekatmata Yatra. Branches of the pilgrimage started at Rameshwaram and Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu, Pashupatinath in Nepal, Gangasagar in West Bengal, Somnath in Gujarat, Parashuram Kund in Arunachal Pradesh, Amritsar in Punjab, Mahavirji in Rajasthan, and Haridwar in Uttar Pradesh, and they all converged in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The aim was to teach Indians the joint importance of Mother India, Mother Cow, and Mother Ganga. The movement's leaders claimed that the pilgrimage would bring unity to a Hindu community that had 'fallen asleep'; it would remind Hindus of the importance of the cow for agriculture and of the Ganga for the advent of Hindu civilization. They linked these goals to their 1984 promise to destroy the mosques in Ayodhya and Kashi and the *idgah* in Mathura. In Haridwar, at the beginning of one part of the Ekatmata Yatra, leaders of the VHP gathered with swamis, shankaracharyas, and members of parliament on Har ki Pauri ghat to inaugurate the event. Afterwards, pilgrims and tourists who had gathered to watch the puja took darshan of these 'spiritual' leaders. In the ensuing pujas these leaders spoke more about decimating Islam than saving the Ganga.¹⁰³ The VHP, Bajrang Dal, Ganga Sabha, Dharmyatra Mahasangh, and Ganga

¹⁰² Ashok Singhal, 'The Tehri Dam: A Monstrosity that Would Sound the Death-knell of the Sacred Ganga', *Organiser*, 28 June 1998, pp. 7–8.

¹⁰³ Kelly D. Alley, 'Separate Domains: Hinduism, Politics and Environmental Pollution', in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky and Water*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 372–3.

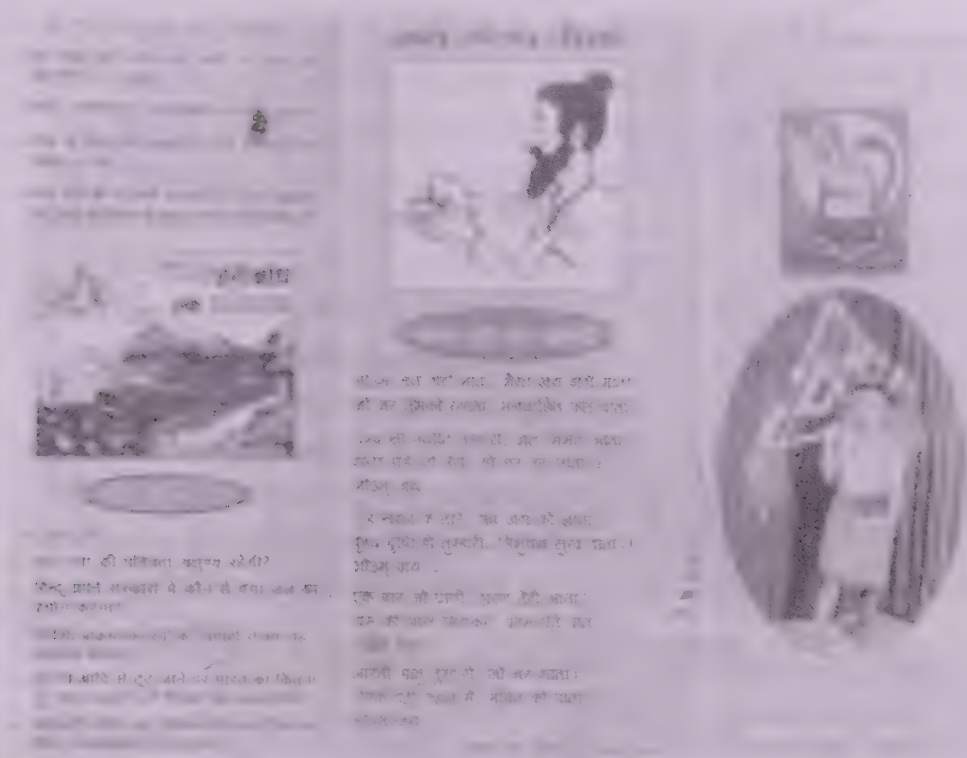


Fig. 4.3: A Pamphlet by VHP, Ganga Sabha—Haridwar, Dharmyatra Mahasangh and Ganga Raksha Samiti against the Tehri Dam

Raksha Samiti also carried out a series of programmes in UP, Delhi, and the contiguous states against the Tehri dam, arguing the dam would destroy Hindu pilgrimages and the holy bits of the river where Hindus immersed the ashes of their dead.¹⁰⁴

The VHP, the Ganga Raksha Yatra, and the Tehri Dam

The VHP's mobilization against the construction of the Tehri dam reached its peak in the year 2000, when, on 19 October at the Ramlila Grounds in Delhi, hundreds of its activists and sadhus began a week-long dharna in makeshift tents. A *sadhvi* called upon the gathering

¹⁰⁴ With the stated objective of acquainting the people with the dangers of polluting the Ganga and opposing the construction of the Tehri dam, the VHP, Calcutta, organized the Ganga Sanrakshan Jagaran Yatra in the first week of November 1997. The yatra started off at Calcutta and culminated in Allahabad, UP. For details, see 'Ban Construction of Tehri Dam: Ashok Singhal', *Organiser*, 2 November 1997, p. 8.

to be prepared for any sacrifice in the name of mother Ganga: 'The Tehri dam is being constructed to imprison the Ganga forever. This is an organized conspiracy to demolish our religion and culture. The way we had to demolish Babri mosque at our own risk, we have to get ready now for the demolition of the Tehri dam.'¹⁰⁵ This event had been preceded by a week-long dharna from 15 October 2000 at Tehri Garhwal under the banner of the VHP and its front organization, the Ganga Raksha Samiti, where Ashok Singhal had threatened to launch an Ayodhya-type movement if the government did not stop construction of the dam. Bahuguna had joined the meeting.¹⁰⁶

The most ambitious of these activities was the Sri Ganga Raksha Yatra, carried out from 26 to 31 July 2000.¹⁰⁷ A few hundred sadhus arrived at the VIP ghat in Har ki Pauri, Haridwar, carrying their



Fig. 4.4: VHP's Week-Long Protest Against the Dam at Ramlila Grounds, Delhi, October 2000

Source: Photograph by the author

¹⁰⁵ Ramlila Grounds, Delhi, 19 October 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Meeting at Tehri, 15 October 2000. See, Mukul Sharma, 'Nature and Nationalism', *Frontline*, 16 February 2001.

¹⁰⁷ I was present throughout the yatra, 26-31 July 2000. See, Mukul Sharma, 'Down with the Dam', *The Express Magazine*, 20 August 2000.

burden of water pots, tridents, and cloth bags as close as possible to the small-built stage. On one side flowed the river Ganga. Soon after the arrival of Ashok Singhal and prominent *sants* and *mahants* like Kaushal Kishore Das, Ramvilas Vedanti, Mahamandaleshwar Bhakt Hari, Swami Vishwamitranand, and Kalyananand, Hindu rituals involving worshipping the river were carried out. The six-day-long Sri Ganga Raksha Yatra, from Haridwar to Delhi, via Bahdarabad, Roorkee, Purkajee, Muzaffarnagar, Khatauli, Modipuram, Meerut and a number of villages and *kasbas*, took off from here, with slogans such as *Bharat Mata ki Jai*, *Sri Ram Janmabhoomi ki Jai*, *Kasi Vishwanath ki Jai*! *Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*! *Jaikara Hai Veer Bajrange*, *Har-Har Mahadeo*!



Fig. 4.5: Ashok Singhal at Har ki Pauri, Haridwar, 26 July 2000

Source: Photograph by the author

गंगा मैया की अपने पुत्रों से गुहार

मेरे प्यारे पुत्रों !

प्रभु तुम्हें लक्ष्मण प्रदान करें !

हो तो, इस पृथ्वी पर आने से पूर्व सृष्टिकर्ता ने मुझे वचन दिया था कि पृथ्वी पर मेरी रक्षा मेरे भक्त और सत करने आज उसका समय आ गया है।

टिहरी बाँध के रूप में मुझे बंदी बनाया जा रहा है। 42 दर्ज किलोमीटर की बाँध कड़ी उस झील में मैं बरसाती पानी के साथ रहने के लिए बाध्य की जाऊँगी। बरसाती जल की मात्रा कितनी होगी, इस तथ्य का आश्वासन आज कोई भी वैज्ञानिक देने को तैयार नहीं। यह भी हो सकता है कि आपके पावन तीर्थ कश्मिरा और हरिद्वार आदि स्थानों पर मेरा जल मात्र 20 प्रतिशत ही रह जाये और तुम्हारी भी गंगा की स्वयं को स्वयं ही प्राप्ति करने की क्षमता समाप्त हो जायेगी और तब मृत्यु को प्राप्त करने वाले अपने प्रिय जनों के मुख में गंगाजल डालकर उसकी मुक्ति की कामना भी तुम न कर सकोगे क्योंकि वह गंगा जल होगा ही नहीं वह तो 80 प्रतिशत बरसाती पानी होगा।

एक चाद

इस संकटकाल में मुझे अपने सुपुत्र प. मदनमोहन मालवीय की बहुत याद आ रही है जिसने ब्रिटिश शासकों के द्वार मुझे हरिद्वार में बाँधने के दुस्साहस को अपने अपूर्व साहस से शिफल कर दिया था और हरिद्वार हरि का द्वार ही बना रहा।

लक्ष्मण की बात

आज मुझे यह कहते लक्ष्मण आ रही है कि तुम स्वतन्त्र हो और मेरे पुत्र होने का दावा भी करते हो। भारीरथ के वंशज और गंगा पुत्र मीथ होने का तुम्हें गौरव भी प्राप्त है फिर भी तुम्हारे ही सामने कुछ दुराग्रहियों के द्वार देश की समृद्धि और धर्मनिरपेक्षता के नाम पर मुझे बंदी बनाया जा रहा है। शिक्कार है तुम्हारे पीरुपय को। मेरे पुत्र लक्ष्मण, तुम कलकत्ता न चले।

मेरे प्यारे पुत्रों से

प्रिय शिशु एवं गंगा भक्तों ! बाँध की त्रासदी तो है ही, मैं तो तुम्हारे कर्मी से दुखी हूँ काश तुम्हें उपरोक्त सब तथ्यों पर ध्यान दिया होता, मेरे भिन्नता पर खड़े कारखानों पर एक दृष्टि डाली होती तो मेरे तन को बिखला करने के महाप्राप से तुम बच जाते।

सावधान

मेरे पुत्रों और शत्रुओं लक्ष्मण ! मैं अपने पुत्रों को उनकी लापरवाही के लिये, शत्रुओं को उनकी दुष्टता के लिये लक्ष्मण कर रही हूँ। मैं समझती हूँ कि लापरवाही और दुष्टता में कोई अन्तर नहीं होता दोनों ही विनाश का कारण बनती हैं। अतः मैं समय रहते लक्ष्मण कर रही हूँ कि यदि मैं अपना विकराल रूप धारण कर लिया तो सर्वनाश निश्चित है। बाँध के टूटने पर हरिद्वार तक 800 फुट तथा मेरठ तक 700 फुट ऊँची मेरी लहरें तुम्हारे घरबार, मठ, मन्दिर, गुम्हारे सभी कुछ बहा ले जायेंगी। एक प्रकार से प्रलय होकर सभी कुछ समाप्त हो जायेगा। तुम्हारा भूत-भविष्य और वर्तमान सब कुछ नष्ट हो जायेगा। तुम्हारी अपनी पहचान ही नष्ट हो जायेगी क्योंकि भारत और भारतीयों की पहचान मुझसे है मेरे पुत्रों, मुझसे अर्थात् गंगा से।

एक सत्प्रयास

मेरे सत् पुत्रों ने मेरी व्यथा को समझकर 15 जून एवं 27 जून 2000 को हरिद्वार में सत्तों की दो विशाल लम्बाओं में एक सत्प्रेषण किया है कि ये 26 जुलाई को हरिद्वार से एक विराट सत् यात्रा निकालेंगे। यह सत् की मुजफ्फरनगर, छातीली, मेरठ, गोरखगढ़ आदि स्थानों पर जन जाग्रण हेतु विशाल धर्म सभायें करती हुई दिनांक 31 जुलाई को चौदनी पीक, दिल्ली में विशाल धर्म सम्मेलन में परिवर्तित हो जायेगी। तदुपरांत सत्तों का एक प्रतिनिधि मण्डल राष्ट्रपति एवं प्रधानमंत्री से मिलेगा।

वह शुभ संदेश मेरे मन में आशा की किरण जगाता है। समय रहते चेत्तों मेरे पुत्रों चेत्तों। ध्यान रहे मैं एही तो पुत्र रहोगे। अतः मेरा प्रेरक आवाज गति से चलता रहे इसी में सबका कल्याण है। शोभशुभ।

तुम्हारी माँ गंगा

मुद्रक : विभवान प्रिन्टिंग प्रेस, रुड़की पिन 72424, 78124

Fig. 4.6: Pamphlet in the Name of Mother Ganga, Declaring the Yatra from 26 to 31 July 2000, Released by VHP

Three well-carved *raths*, carrying an idol of mother Ganga and an earthen pot of immortal Ganga water, called *amrit kalash*, led the caravan of over two-dozen vehicles in the Ganga Raksha Yatra and its regional editions. The route is closed to vehicular traffic in this season, but the caravan took it and passed through thousands of devotee kawarias. The caravan had a huge loudspeaker system that

incessantly blared out popular Hindi bhajans. These performances and processes of ritualization continued all along the yatra, blurring the boundaries between a few hundred VHP *sadhus-sants* primarily from Uttar Pradesh and thousands of pilgrims across the country. The yatra thus broadened its canvas and strengthened its appeal. No wonder Ashok Singhal could say at a meeting in the Sanatan Dharma Prakashchand Girls College, Roorkee: 'I am here not to talk about the seismicity of the dam, or the cost-benefit of the project. I am talking about Gangatva. Gangatva is Hindutva. Hindutva is Rashtratva.'

The Raksha Yatra for the Holy Hindu Ganga was intended to purvey information, beliefs, and values which would influence events not just pertaining to the environment, but others more local. For



Fig. 4.7: Idol of Mother Ganga with Amrit Kalash at the Ganga Raksha Yatra

Source: Photograph by the author

Ram Vilas Vedanti, a *mahant* from Ayodhya, the prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was like Ram and the *sadhus-sants* in the yatra were like his Lakshman. He addressed a meeting in a village temple at Budhana on 28 July: 'It was after Sri Ram's victory over Sri Lanka and his coronation that Lakshman came to worship his brother. The guard informed Lord Ram, but Ram forgot who Lakshman was. After being reminded of his brother, he came down from his throne to receive him. Our Vajpayee will do the same thing with us *sadhus*.' It occasionally came down to specifics—a particular state, a territory, and certain societies. In an evening meeting at Roorkee, Singhal made a special and detailed announcement of how the UP chief minister had repealed the UP Religious Act; how he came a long way to Haridwar to reassure the *sadhus*; how some of them had dared to doubt the integrity of the RSS and decided against participation in the yatra.

Environmental myths continued being created around the Ganga and the Tehri dam, combining facts and fancies. Singhal said on the first day of the yatra: 'After the construction of the Tehri dam, the Ganga will become a rainy river. In places of pilgrimage like Haridwar and Rishikesh, the rain water will fill the course of the river Ganga and only 20 per cent will be the original Ganga water. The Ganga will not remain the same and her capacity for self-purification will be finished.' In the following days, through the public announcement system of the rath, and from several renowned speakers, we heard of the Ganga turning into a small drain, even a tank. The question was not only 'is it true?' but also 'whose truth is it?' The myths were portrayed in specific texts of Sri Ram, which provided a ready-made source for the production of a particular national ethos and social metaphors. Swami Chinmayanand, a BJP MP, said: 'In his journey through Ganga, Lord Sri Ram decided to bow down before Nishad. He could have made a bridge over it, as he did in the case of a sea.' And then added conclusively, 'Only those who understand the issue of faith in Ram can understand the faith in Ganga.' For Jeeveshwar Mishra, Convenor, Ganga Raksha Yatra, the reservoir of the dam was being built over the place where Hanuman had got life-giving herbs for the dying Lakshman. Another, Vedanti, said in a meeting at Khatauli: 'In case of the Tehri dam being damaged,

from Gangotri to Gangasagar more than 1000 cities, including Calcutta, Patna, Kanpur, will be drowned completely in 700 feet water.' The fear also reflected concern for the many *maths* and ashrams that were making huge sums of money in places of pilgrimage. As Swami Chinmayanand expressed it: 'Ganga flow ensures enormous cash flow in our ashrams of Haridwar-Rishikesh. If something goes wrong to this flow here, the money flow will dry out.'

Ashok Singhal, Kalyananand, Kaushal Kishore and almost everyone else said that the Tehri dam was a conspiracy of the West in general and communist Russia in particular to destroy Hindu culture and India. The logic was simple: first, the dam would be built, and then it would be destroyed either by an earthquake or by a bomb installed by an ISI agent (of Pakistan), thereby wiping out Hindu religious places and people. To stop this conspiracy, the Tehri dam had to be stopped. And the way to stop it recalled the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement and the destruction of the Babri mosque. 'The way we decided to demolish the mosque and build a temple there, we are now deciding to stop the dam', announced a local VHP leader in Roorkee. This was supplemented by the wall-writings of the Bajrang Dal, here and there, near the locations of meetings. In Roorkee, for example, a graffiti went: *Pukarti hai Maa, Pukarta hai Bharti, Khoon se Tilak Karo, Goliyon se Aarti!* (This is the call of our Mother, the call of Bharat, mark your forehead with blood and worship with bullets). In Bahdarabad: *Jis Desh mein Shastr aur Shaastr ki Puja Hoti Hai, Woh Kabhi Parajit Nahi Hota!* (Where arms and religious scriptures are worshipped, a country is never defeated).

The yatras tried to bind Hindus while sidelining Muslims. In response to a question about the presence of a sizeable Muslim population along the yatra route, and their likely response to a Hinduized campaign, Maha Mandaleshwar Swami Bhakt Hari, a prominent figure of the campaign, said, 'Ganga is our mother. How can they accompany us, who do not consider Ganga their mother? They are unworthy, bad sons. Even then, Ganga blesses them equally.' Thus, within the VHP campaign, feelings for the river Ganga crystallized around the form of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous, naturally existing nation. Hindu national identity gave the pre-eminent

sense of belonging, and environmental politics was made synonymous with protecting elements of that identity. There were repeated and sympathetic references to Sunderlal Bahuguna during the yatra—not a populist attempt to jump on Bahuguna's bandwagon but rather an effort to make common cause with a particular form of environmentalism in India. Thus, Singhal and others of his ilk repeatedly said they had the support of the existing environmental protestors and personalities.



The opposition to the Tehri dam was not just a simple disagreement about questions of viability and non-viability, costs and benefits, and displacement or resettlement. Like Chipko, it struck right at the heart of philosophical, cultural, religious, political, and moral debates around contemporary development efforts. However, the increasing references and emphasis by prominent environmental activists and groups to the purity and holiness of the Ganga, the evocation of Hindu myths and ideas of cultural pollution, and the raising of fears and conspiracies became a breeding ground for conservatism. The Hindu Right too moved beyond its familiar extremist milieu and made common cause with Green issues, in the process gaining for themselves a certain credibility.¹⁰⁸ In this process the issue of the Tehri dam became the means for combining sacredness with impulse, the gravity of high politics with the solemnity of daily worship, and nature with nationalism. River water was transformed into a political, moral, and emotional idea.

This collaboration, sometimes inadvertent, between the activities and views of environmental activists and Hindu nationalists raises larger questions on certain facets and ideologies of the Hindu Right and environmental movements in India. It would be a crude simplification to see the VHP's engagement with the issue of a dam—an environmental question—as merely a simple political attempt to harness votes in favour of the BJP. After all, it is not at the level of

¹⁰⁸ Mukul Sharma, 'Saffronizing Green', *Seminar*, no. 516, August 2002.

direct political or electoral success that we count the influence of the VHP, but rather at the level of political-environmental discourse; it was actually their comfort with a stream of environmental discourse that needs to be taken into account. The issues of dam, displacement, and resettlement are, first and foremost, political issues. No doubt important economic, ecological, cultural, legal, administrative and other issues were also involved, but, ultimately, seeing the whole course of events surrounding the Tehri dam, it can be said that political battles and persuasion between the contending parties determined the fate of the project. Though there were divergent interactions and contests, the dominant political discourse of Hindu nationalists was seen to possess the power to absorb, co-opt, and alter the views and values of an environmental movement, which in turn contained the seeds of conservatism. In sum, the myth of the Ganga, having been seen to embody Hindu beliefs, was perfectly deployed by Hindu nationalism to influence large sections of the Hindu masses. The essential purpose was to connect the Ganga to an idea of the Hindu community, and this community to a Hindu nation. Green politics was thereby effectively made Saffron.

Environmentalism and Revivalism

The Vrindavan Forest Revival and Conservation Project in Mathura

The Vrindavan Forest Revival Project, or the Vrindavan Conservation Project, of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) reveals certain processes of religious revivalism in environmental politics. Here, particular religious symbols and places become embedded with the idea and practice of environmentalism in particular cultural and social settings, which in turn become allied with a sectarian Hindu politics. By focusing on understandings of a place, and of the deity Krishna by environmental organizations and activists in Vrindavan in the 1990s, I look at how, through environmentalism, Hindu politics finds a fertile ground in a region. As we have seen in the earlier chapters, environmentalism within one variety of Hindu community is never simply an expression of established religious or cultural paradigms. It is also a product of the encounter between popular understandings of place, existing environmental narratives and created versions, religious cults, ideas of masculinity, and perspectives deployed to construct and narrate a political vision of the past and history. Although referred through religion and culture, the place and the central figure on whom people are focused (earlier Anna Hazare and Sunderlal Bahuguna; here Lord Krishna) are not static but are historically constructed and open to continuous change and manipulation.

Vrindavan, Mathura, Krishna: The Background

Vrindavan, a town located in the cultural and linguistic region of Braj, situated on the banks of the river Yamuna in present-day Uttar Pradesh (UP), has a special, mystic place for Hindus in India. The Brajbhoomi is considered sacred, various locations and places within it having been associated with the activities of Lord Krishna. It is said that 'The associations are in fact so strong and specific, that they create a sense of immediacy which blurs the distinctions between myth, legend and history.'¹ The *Mathura Gazetteer*, published in 1911, suggests that Vrindavan was constituted as a municipality in 1866. The population was 20,350 in 1872. In 1901 it was 22,717 and, classified by religion, there were 21,088 Hindus, 1409 Muslims, 156 Christians, 40 Jains, and 24 of unspecified religion. There were no manufacturers in the city, but the city had a police station, a post office, a registration office, a dispensary, a primary and a middle school for boys, and a school for girls. There were within the limits of Vrindavan municipality about 1000 temples and 32 ghats.²

The district gazetteer also indicates that most people in Vrindavan generally saw themselves fitting into one of the traditional varna categories: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra. The famous district memoir of Mathura, written by F.S. Growse, also found

Brinda-ban . . . a rich and prosperous municipality, and for several centuries past one of the most holy places of the Hindus . . . the word Brinda-ban derived from an obvious physical feature, and when first attached to the spot signified no more than the 'tulsi grove', *brinda* and *tulsi* being synonymous terms, used indifferently to denote the sacred aromatic herb known to botanists as *Ocimum sanctum*. But this explanation is far too simple to find favour with the more modern and extravagant school of Vaishnava sectaries.³

¹ K.T. Ravindran and Team, *Vrindavan: Restoration of Keshi and Panda-wala Ghats*, Delhi, INTACH, 1988, p. 3.

² D.L. Drake-Brockman (ed. and comp.), *Mathura: A Gazetteer*, Usha Publications, Delhi, 1984 [1911], pp. 241–50.

³ F.S. Growse, *Mathura: A District Memoir*, 1882, rpnt New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1979, pp. 184–6.

While detailing the diversity of impact of Vaishnava reformers in Vrindavan, the memoir also marks the particularly deep influence of Chaitanya and Bengali Vaishnavas here.⁴ Several religious and literary texts, like the *Rig Veda* and the Vaishnava *Puranas*—especially the *Harivamsha Vishnu*, *Brahma*, *Padma*, and *Brahmavaivarta Puranas*, and most popularly, *Bhagavata Purana*—are said to provide a repertoire of sources for the images of Vrindavan and Krishna.⁵ It is believed that the Vrindavan area saw the entire sequence of Indian civilization in northern India, from the Aryan conquerors to the Maurya, Kushan, and Gupta empires, to the Turkish and Afghan invasions, to Mughal dominance and British rule. It also had its share of foreign visitors. Thus, ‘while Mathura has historically been the political seat of the district that bears its name, at least since the construction of its first temples in the sixteenth century, most inhabitants of the region have considered Vrindavan to be its cultural centre.’⁶

Presently, Vrindavan city comes within Mathura district and *tehsil*. It is part of the Mathura assembly and parliamentary constituencies. According to the 2001 census, Vrindavan is spread over 2.25 square kilometres, has 10,086 households with a population of 56,692. The religion-wise break-up of the population is 93.32 per cent (52,906) Hindus, 6.37 per cent (3613) Muslims, 0.03 per cent (15) Sikhs, 0.07 per cent (38) Christians, 0.04 per cent (23) Jains, and 0.02 per cent (10) Buddhists. Among the Hindus, the population of Scheduled Castes is 4967 (8.76 per cent).⁷ Most people of Vrindavan make

⁴ Ibid., pp. 184–98. It is said that Chaitanya’s disciples were the first temple builders in Vrindavan. The special tenet of Bengali Vaishnavas is the all-sufficiency of faith in the divine Krishna, such faith being adequately expressed by the mere repetition of his name, without added prayer or devotion. Chaitanya’s life and doctrines are recorded in a voluminous Bengali work entitled *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, composed by one of his disciples, Krishna Das.

⁵ Rajasekhara Dasa Brahmachari, *The Complete Guide to Vrindavana: India’s Most Holy City of Over 5000 Temples*, Vedanta Vision Publications, n.d., n.p., pp. 7–10.

⁶ Charles R. Brooks, *The Hare Krishnas in India*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 27–55.

⁷ N. Seshagiri (chief ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Cities and Towns in India Vol. IX (Uttar Pradesh) Part II*, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 2008, pp. 1439–41.

their livelihood either directly or indirectly from the pilgrimage trade. The pilgrimage complex has continued to expand, best exemplified by the big temple of Krishna-Balram constructed by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in 1975, whose priests and staff are mainly American and European devotees.

Mathura is recognized as one of Hinduism's seven sacred cities. For more than a millennium and a half before the medieval period, the place had been an important centre simultaneously of three religious systems: the Brahminical, the Jain, and the Buddhist. Subsequently, it became a stronghold of the Krishna-bhakti cult. It is believed that Krishna was born in the city of Mathura and passed his early life in its neighbourhood. Many of the important places in the district are associated with one or other story connected with the Krishna legend.⁸ It is called the centre of Vraj, the original region of the cowherd god-cum-epic hero Krishna, whose lively *lilas* enthral and evoke devotion, resulting in the production of voluminous devotional texts and scores of songs through the ages. Exquisite artefacts from Mathura's past—its stone sculptures and terracotta figures, its stupa fragments and temples—excite many lovers of early Indian art.⁹

The historical evidence also points to a much more heterogeneous composition of social groups in Mathura.¹⁰ Pilgrims come here throughout the year to bathe in the Yamuna and visit temples, particularly the one on Krishna's believed birth-site, and the Dwarkadhish temple. The latter is the largest *pusthi marg* temple in the town. It is dedicated to Krishna as Dwarkadhish (Lord of Dwarka). Many come for the annual Braj *chaurasi kos parikrama* (a 160-mile circumambulation around the land of Braj), a 40-day pilgrimage, visiting many of the places where Krishna performed his miraculous *lilas* as a child.¹¹ It is also a centre of popular Vaishnava sects, such as the Gaudiya Sampradaya, which attracts followers from Bengal. There

⁸ S.C. Bhatt (ed.), *The Encyclopaedic District Gazetteers of India: Central Zone* (Vol. 6), New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 1997, pp. 821–3.

⁹ B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Foreword', in Vijaya Laxmi Singh, *Mathura: The Settlement Pattern and Cultural Profile of an Early Historical City*, New Delhi, Sandeep Prakashan, 2005, pp. vii–viii.

¹⁰ Singh, *Mathura*, pp. 120–49.

¹¹ O.M. Lynch, 'The Mastram: Emotion and Person among Mathura's

are in addition a few establishments of the Ramanandi orders, whose members are primarily devotees of Ram.¹² The old part of the city is constructed on a hilly area on the banks of the river Yamuna. It is constituted of a complicated labyrinth of very narrow alleys which lead to ghats. This area of the city was traditionally divided into 110 *mohallas*.¹³ Today, the neighbourhoods still remain an important focus of many cultural and religious activities. Certain neighbourhoods are largely constituted of Muslims. An estimated 20 per cent of Mathura city's population is Muslim. According to the 2001 census, the total population of Mathura city is 302,770.

The regions of Mathura and Vrindavan have proved to be deeply symbolic. They have served an ideological purpose, imprinting a culturally constructed identity in the post-colonial polity of UP. After Independence, two of the prominent colonial names changed were Ganges to 'Ganga' and Muttra to 'Mathura'. In the course of debates on the reorganization of UP in the 1950s, it was argued that the elements of unity in the state were far more important than the differences. The holy cities of Ayodhya, Mathura, Vrindavan, Kashi, Haridwar, and Prayag were said to be the repositories of spiritual influence, providing homogeneity and oneness on a higher plane.¹⁴ The overwhelmingly Hindu character of the city makes Mathura an important site for Hindu nationalist leaders. Hindu religious imagery, in particular of Krishna, is deployed to forge and popularize Hindu political agendas and attract support for rallies where 'activists publicise Hindu nationalist ideology and organise support for the movement.'¹⁵ In 1998, for instance, the shankaracharyas of Dwarka, Badrikashram,

Chaubes', in O.M. Lynch (ed.), *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, pp. 99–116.

¹² R. Burghart, 'The Founding of the Ramanandi Sect', *Ethnohistory*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1978, pp. 121–9.

¹³ Growse, *Mathura*, p. 271.

¹⁴ Gyanesh Kudaisya, *Region, Nation. 'Heartland': Uttar Pradesh in India's Body Politic*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 341–99.

¹⁵ L. McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1996, p. 43.

and Puri came together for the first time, after a 22-day-long festival at Vrindavan, to call for unifying Hinduism.¹⁶

Historically, it has become usual to speak of three Krishnas, although each melts into the others. There is Krishna, the chief of the Yadavas, who served as Arjuna's charioteer in the *Bharata* epic. There is Krishna, the god incarnate, the instructor of Arjuna and, through him, of all mankind, who appears not in the old epic but in the *Mahabharata*. Then there is Krishna of Gokula, the god brought up among cowherds, the mischievous child, the endearing lover, the eternal paradox of flesh and spirit.¹⁷ There is Krishna the warrior, the struggling hero of the *Mahabharata*. One of its parts, the *Bhagavad Gita*, is believed to be the utterance of Krishna himself.¹⁸

It is the image of Krishna as the rigorous, moral, military and masculine advisor of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* that welcomes pilgrims into the Krishnajanmabhoomi complex. This area was constructed in the late 1950s. It stands opposite the Shahi mosque, which was allegedly constructed in the seventeenth century on the ruins of a Krishna nativity temple, the Kesava Deo temple. Hindu nationalist narratives tell the story of how a series of Muslim invaders, concluding with Aurangzeb, demolished the Kesava Deo temple and built a mosque in its place. Hindu nationalists believe that Krishna was born 3500 years ago in a prison cell where his parents were held captive by the tyrannical king Kansa. This cell is supposed to be located under the present mosque. Today, against the rear wall of the mosque is an underground chamber which is said to represent the cell in which Krishna was born.¹⁹

In 1984 the VHP decided to 'liberate' three temple sites in North India: Mathura, Varanasi, and Ayodhya. Although the Sangh Parishad chose to focus its initial efforts on the Ramjanmabhoomi in

¹⁶ *The Hindu*, 25 November 1998.

¹⁷ Daniel H.H. Ingalls, 'Foreword', in Milton Singer (ed.), *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, Honolulu, East-West Centre Press, 1966, p. v.

¹⁸ A. Hiltebeitel, 'Empire, Invasion, and India's National Epics', *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1998, pp. 387–421.

¹⁹ Lucia Michelutti, *The Vernacularisation of Democracy: Politics, Caste and Religion in India*, New Delhi, Routledge, 2008, pp. 44–7.

Ayodhya, it has since taken up the liberation of Krishna's birthplace. In particular, on the yearly occasion of Krishna's birthday celebrations (Janmashtami) and the anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, it has organized demonstrations and protests on this issue.²⁰ The Krishnajanmabhoomi problem has also been raised in pre-election campaigning, in an attempt to mobilize the Yadav community in UP. The BJP employed this strategy in 1996. According to a Hindu activist, 'Though Lord Krishna cannot be compared with Lord Ram as a role model of the Hindu way of life, and though (the) Mathura deity does not have as much popular appeal as Ram, we [the VHP] had thought it would generate enthusiasm at least among the Yadav community in UP who consider Krishna as their ancestor.'²¹

The 1980s saw the most crucial phase in the transformation of UP politics. Four factors dominated the process of change: the alienation of rural producers, the discontent of marginal groups in rural society, the growing confidence of the backward castes, and the challenge of communalism. Widespread social and economic disaffection was manifest in two ways: by the decline of the Congress as the principal actor in UP politics; and ineptitude in managing social diversity, increasing the political salience of communal strategies. The social and political changes have been most marked in western UP.²² The underlying caste and community dynamics of UP in general and western UP in particular has enabled ruling class parties to exploit caste and community appeals to their advantage.²³ From the 1950s on,

²⁰ *The Hindustan Times*, 22 August 1995; *Frontline*, 8 September 1995; *The Economic Times*, 20 August 1996; *The Indian Express*, 13 August 1998; *The Hindustan Times*, 15 August 2000.

²¹ Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, 'Saffron Offensive: "Liberation Theology" of a Different Kind', *Frontline*, 8 September 1995, pp. 4–16.

²² Zoya Hasan, 'Party Politics and Communal Mobilization in Uttar Pradesh', in Rajeshwari Ghosh (ed.), *In Quest of a Secular Symbol: Ayodhya and After*, Cutin University of Technology, Indian Ocean Centre and South Asian Research Unit, 1996, p. 59.

²³ Zoya Hasan, *Dominance and Mobilisation: Rural Politics in Western Uttar Pradesh 1930–1980*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1980, pp. 12–23.

communal riots have regularly recurred in Mathura city. The city was under curfew in December 1992, August 2000, and March 2002. In all these instances, Muslim–Hindu or Christian–Hindu tensions were the cause. In fact, Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim rhetoric is present in the everyday life of Mathura's residents.

There is a permanent military command, 'the black cat', whose duty is to protect the temple and the mosque twenty-four hours a day.²⁴ Electorally, throughout the 1990s the BJP was in control of Mathura. They won the 1991, 1996, 1998, and 1999 Lok Sabha elections and dominated in the five Vidhan Sabha constituencies in the 1996 state elections. In several parliamentary and assembly elections after 2000, the BJP started losing, and other parties like the Congress, the Bahujan Samaj Party, and the Rashtriya Lok Dal claimed some seats.

Vrindavan and its Environmental Problems

Present-day Vrindavan is besieged by a number of environmental problems. The population growth of Vrindavan town has not only been fast, its distribution has remained uneven. A large number of pilgrims—two to three million by different estimates—visit it every year. Activity connected with construction, transport, real estate, and the market is widespread and visible. 'Welcome to this holy land of Lord Krishna. Holy forest plots for sale. Freehold residential complex in very peaceful and tranquil atmosphere', reads the hoarding of a real estate developer in Vrindavan. According to *State of the Environment: Vrindavan*, sponsored by WWF-India, spiralling population densities and poor sanitation and civic facilities, alongside real estate speculation, remain the root cause of several environmental problems in the city.²⁵ Temple trusts, ashrams, and land dealers have interests in common: together they own 70 per cent of the urban land. The lack of adequate drinking water is acute in Vrindavan and the area's

²⁴ Michelutti, *Vernacularisation of Democracy*, p. 47.

²⁵ Daman J. Singh and Aditya Vir, *State of the Environment: Vrindavan*, New Delhi, WWF-India, 1994, pp. 1–23.

ground aquifers are polluted daily because pathetic sanitary conditions and inadequate solid waste disposal leach untreated pathogens into the substrata, contaminating the underground water that is meant to serve the town. Choked sewers, overflowing drains, and garbage dumps are everywhere in sight. The outlets of individual toilets and septic tanks are illegally linked to overflowing sewer lines or directly joined to open drains. The water table is falling by as much as five feet a year, and the quality of the available water is deteriorating. The river Yamuna is also heavily polluted by industrial runoff from factories upriver and from sewage, some of which comes from Vrindavan. Raw sewage flows over the *parikrama* pilgrimage path and discharges directly into the Yamuna. The problem is so serious that the Government of India has declared the Yamuna's water unfit for drinking and bathing.²⁶

Many have spoken of Vrindavan's environmental problems. One account says that the town has become badly deforested and the area is rapidly turning into a desert such as is to be found just to the west, in Rajasthan. Criticism of this variety has prompted many organizations and individuals to initiate rectificatory programmes in Vrindavan. According to one report, past attempts at protecting the identity and environment of Vrindavan go back to 1880, when the district magistrate, F.S. Growse, tried to restore the ancient Brahma Kund. In 1958 Shri Kanhaiya Lal Gupta, a member of the legislative assembly, made efforts to bring the river back to Vrindavan's ghats but official apathy let him down. In 1969 Shri K.P. Ramanuja Das, a 'saint' from Govardhan, formed the Braj Sanskriti Sanrakshan Samiti (Braj Cultural Conservation Committee). After a few months this became dormant. In 1980 the Sri Vrindavan Swaroputthan Paribhavna (Movement for the Restoration of Vrindavan's Identity) was set up; this too was not able to achieve the desired results. INTACH made a cleansing plan in 1984 but it petered out. The UP government set up the Vraja Bhumi Conservation and Development Committee in 1984 with the chief minister as chairperson and various senior government

²⁶ Bruce M. Sullivan, 'Theology and Ecology at the Birthplace of Kṛṣṇa', in Lauce E. Nelson (ed.), *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 252–3.

babus as members. The committee met once in 1985 but has been defunct ever since. In 1985 attempts to hand over the entire solid waste disposal system to Sulabh International were stalled by the Jal Nigam (State Water Corporation). In 1986 AFRO was involved in social forestry and the management of water resources. They gave up because of the apathy of the district authorities. In 1987 a national seminar was organized by a historian, Professor Krishna Dutt Bajpai, on 'Sri Krishna in Epochal Vraja and Indian Culture', and its report was published.²⁷

Vrindavan Forest Revival and Conservation Project: An Account

The Vrindavan Forest Revival Project started as a small environmental effort by those who cared for Lord Krishna and His land. It is said that Ranchor Prime, an English member of ISKCON, who was familiar with the situation in Vrindavan, conceived a plan—with Swami Sewak Sharan 'Hit Kinkar' of the Movement for Ecological Restoration of Vrindavan and a long-time resident of the area—to plant trees along the 11-kilometre *parikrama marg* that encircles the town. Ranchor Prime prepared a report for the WWF.

Established in 1961, the WWF is one of the largest international conservation organizations, its work focused around biodiversity and habitat conservation.²⁸ The organization highlights the ecological value of cultures and religious traditions while funding such projects. It provided initial funding for three years to the Vrindavan project, to run from mid-1991 through mid-1994, of some \$40,000 per year. ISKCON donated 1.5 acres of land adjacent to the pilgrimage path for a nursery to raise some 10,000 trees of local origin to be planted in the succeeding months.²⁹

²⁷ *Report of Twenty Fifth Public Hearing on Environment and Development*, The People's Commission on Environment and Development, India, Vrindavan, 16 September 1995, pp. 4–5.

²⁸ For details, see WWF website www.panda.org.

²⁹ WWF-India, *Vrindavan Forest Revival Project (Brochure 1)*, Delhi, 1993; Ranchor Prime, *Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth*, London, Cassell, 1992, pp. 104–18.

Ranchor Prime was a major influence from the outset in this Vrindavan Forest Revival Project. He has been an advisor to the WWF on religion and conservation, and a disciple of Bhaktivedanta Swami, taking on the name Ranchor Das. He joined the London Radha Krishna temple during the 1970s and pioneered a Hare Krishna centre in Manchester. He also built and managed a new Radha Krishna temple in the West End of London. The Vrindavan project was formally initiated on 21 November 1991, the festival day of Vrinda Devi, goddess of the local flora. A pledge was taken: 'The forest of Vrindavan is the sacred playground of Radha and Krishna. However, we, the people of this region, have cut its trees, polluted its Yamuna River, and spoilt its sacred dust with our rubbish and sewage. I pledge that from now on I will do all within my power to protect Vrindavan from further destruction and to restore it to its original beauty.'³⁰

Other official accounts available on the rationale of this project complement each other. WWF-India sees Vrindavan and its programme as 'A Symbol of Regeneration' and 'an effort to involve Hindus in conserving their environment'. It adds: 'Although Krishna is the symbol of environmental purity and beauty, his holy land, like many of India's sacred places, has become a symbol of neglect and decline . . . WWF-India wants pilgrims to see Vrindavan's environment restored and cared for, and the original Hindu traditions of cleanliness and respect for nature being practised in this great holy place of India. This will demonstrate that these traditions need not just be something of the past.'³¹ Vrindavan's 'strategic position' also had an important bearing on its selection: 'Vrindavan lies at the focus of Braj, which has been worshipped for thousands of years as the sacred land of Krishna. Braj is inside the "golden triangle" between Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur. Mathura, Krishna's birthplace five miles south-west of Vrindavan, is one of India's oldest cities.'³²

The symbol of a parikrama path was especially chosen and explained in detail:

³⁰ WWF-India, *Vrindavan Forest (Brochure 1)*.

³¹ WWF-India, *Vrindavan Forest Revival Project (Brochure 2)*, Delhi, n.d.

³² *Ibid.*

WWF-India has chosen Vrindavan's parikrama path as a symbol around which to focus its conservation efforts. Every sacred Hindu site has a parikrama path: a pilgrim route that encircles it. The performance of parikrama, or walking around a holy place, is one of the most powerful ways of honouring it. Serious pilgrims to Vrindavan all do parikrama, usually in groups. Residents sometimes take vows to do parikrama every day, every week, every month or on special holy days. Sometimes thousands do it at one time. The eleven-kilometre walk passes mostly through sand and loose earth, and the bare footprints of walkers are left imprinted on the path. Over thousands of years, it has become hallowed ground. It is nothing less than a living temple. However, the twentieth century has taken its toll on the parikrama path.³³

Stage One of the project was to encourage community involvement so that the trees planted would be protected. Stage Two included further planting along the entire pathway and continuing outreach efforts to involve the populace. Assorted eyesores and environmental problems were to be dealt with along the way: 'A solution to the problems of Vrindavan's inadequate sewerage system is badly needed: at present untreated sewage discharges into the Yamuna river through unsightly open ditches which pass alongside the parikrama path, adding to the already high degree of pollution in the river and forcing pilgrims to bathe in contaminated water. WWF-India is seeking a solution to this as it spoils the aesthetic image and spiritual atmosphere of Vrindavan.'³⁴

In 1994 the Vrindavan Forest Revival Project was renamed the Vrindavan Conservation Project. This was not simply a change of name: from now on the project became more ambitious and wide-ranging. Its project-in-charge in Delhi outlined the change: 'The project was now envisaged to include other religious places of Braj, like Barsana, Nandgaon, Sunrakh, Mathura and its temple, in its area of operation. It was also thought to involve increasingly religious people and their organizations, ashrams and trusts in the work. We

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

realized that the time had come to broadly mobilize peoples' specific faith, leaning, and spiritual belief for the protection of the holy place and its environment.³⁵ Widening its influence in this phase, the project could now boast of its links with many layers of society. It could also rightly claim to understand the existing socio-political currents. According to a WWF-India brochure:

A movement has been started successfully by WWF-India. Strong linkages have been formed. An Advisory Group of 11 leading citizens is now advising the project and establishing crucial linkages within Vrindavan's intricate religious, political, and social structure. Local groups such as neighbourhood associations and citizen NGOs such as the Bal Vikas Manch (Child Development Forum) and Vrindavan Vikas Parishad (Vrindavan Development Association) have undertaken joint work programmes and created joint charters to support the project activities. A youth group has helped WWF in promotion campaigns and plantation programmes along with other youth bodies such as the NSS and Scouts. International well-wishers such as 'Friends of Vrindavan' (UK) are also very supportive of the programme.³⁶

The programmes of the WWF Vrindavan Conservation Project were manifold and widespread, including planting, nature clubs, community awareness, education, citizen's action, river watch, and the protection of sacred groves. It maintained ten nurseries in schools, temples, ashrams, and villages. Trees were planted along the *parikrama* path, on roadsides, in public spaces, ashrams, temples, and schools. Its educational activities ranged from cultural programmes, such as dramas, folk dances and songs, to poster-making, field trips, teacher training seminars, public hearings, and meetings. A variety of community awareness activities like environmental rallies, *rasilas*, environmental dramas, art exhibitions, video shows, and prayer lectures were held.³⁷ Sacred grove projects were under way in several places of Vraj

³⁵ Interview with Anup Sharma, project-in-charge in Delhi, Delhi, WWF-India, 12 August 1999. The project officer in Vrindavan coincidentally also has the same name, only spelt a little differently as Anoop Sharma.

³⁶ WWF-India, *Vrindavan Conservation Project (Brochure)*, Delhi, 1995.

³⁷ For details, see Friends of Vrindavan, *1998 Newsletter*, London, p. 13.

like Ral, Baelvan, Basanti, Narakund, and Manasarovar. Simultaneously, cleanliness drives were organized in temple complexes, largely involving the sweepers of the Braj area. In all such activities of the project, along with WWF, Friends of Vrindavan, ISKCON, Sanskar Bharti, VHP and Braj Rakshak Sena were the formal or informal partners at different points of time.

Though it is difficult to assess the impact of the project because of its geographical spread and unevenness, WWF-India reported that from mid-1993 through mid-1994, 'cultural activities by children were an important instrument for influencing parents and community', which incorporated folk dramas on Krishna and Radha's love of the environment.³⁸ The report went on to state that at the end of three years of work, the programme had successfully 'evoked the people's collective religious conscience; previously they had no answer to the drastic decline in their environment, and the quiet abandonment of religious conservation practice is now being slowly reversed.'³⁹ The WWF further argued that it was because of their Vrindavan project that the UP government had decided to include traditional religious views of nature into their official school curriculum.⁴⁰

Thus, in the recently dominant environmental narratives and projects on Vrindavan, the place and its richness were out there, in the heart of North India, awaiting environmental discovery, and would provide an antidote to the poisons of pollution and other forms of degradation. The place and its mythology had been constructed as a hybrid of Braj/Vrindavan/Hindu and provided with a new sacred identity with which to legitimize ecological cleansing. This process of transformation and identity layering has, as we shall see, been a conscious and oft-repeated 'discovery' and reformulation of a specific past. The attempt has been to arrive at a set of Hindu traditions, symbols, and ways of life that can be used in relation to or towards the modification of existing socio-political realities.

³⁸ WWF-India, *Reviving the Sacred Forests of Vrindavana*. WWF-India Technical Report, July 1993 to June 1994, Delhi, 1994, p. 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ WWF-India, *Vrindavan Conservation Project (Brochure)*.

Hindu Environmental Utopias and Dystopias

The most tangible expression of religious ecology is the veneration of nature. Various dimensions of the natural world are designated sacred and viewed with deep respect on account of their assumed holiness.⁴¹ The concept of sacred groves in India is said to have its root in pre-historic times, stretching back to the time before the Vedas. This notion of holiness was apparently extended by Vedic migrants to specific species and based on a holistic ecological philosophy. Different offshoots of Hinduism further refined and concretized the concept.⁴² A religious or cultural sense of place allowed people to articulate seemingly diverse concerns.⁴³ In the case of Vrindavan, the imagery of a sacred environment flows from a single historical narrative of a city, cast broadly in the Hindu mould. Simultaneously, these environmental narratives capture some important features of Hindu political identity and community. Such descriptions are constructed and reconstructed in diverse fields of activity, leading to a subtle and constant interplay between sectarian Hindu politics and the environment.

⁴¹ Chris C. Park, *Sacred Worlds: An Introduction to Geography and Religion*, London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 246–85.

⁴² P.S. Ramakrishnan, 'Conserving the Sacred: Ecological and Policy Implications', in Ashish Kothari, Neema Pathak, R.V. Anuradha, and Bansure Taneja (eds), *Communities and Conservation: Natural Resource Management in South and Central Asia*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1998, pp. 239–51. Also see M.D. Subash Chandran and J. Donald Hughes, 'The Sacred Groves of South India: Ecology, Traditional Communities and Religious Change', *Social Compass*, vol. 44, no. 3, 1997, pp. 413–27. Vraja's forests are also called sacred groves, filled with divine and magical symbols of Krishna. For details, see Ranchor Das (Ranchor Prime), 'Protecting Vraja's Sacred Groves', *Back to Godhead: The Magazine of the Hare Krishna Movement*, September–October 1998, pp. 45–9.

⁴³ For details, see Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 529. He shows how the sense of a place can be used for different purposes: for the defence of home and community, for the protection of natural environments, and for a pleasant and healthy workplace.

Most environmental narratives on Vrindavan create a utopia which has no real existence. The constructed utopia is very much an imagined space. In this utopian narration, flowers always bloom in Vrindavan and its groves are inhabited with various kinds of 'decorated' deer. The birds here are always chirping, the peacocks dancing, the bees humming, the cuckoos singing five kinds of tune. The lakes are surrounded by green grass and various kinds of lotus flowers bloom in them. The breeze carries the aromatic pollen of these flowers and when particles of water from the waves of the Yamuna, the lakes, and the waterfalls touch the bodies of local inhabitants, they at once experience a cooling effect. The many waterfalls are always merrily pouring, their sound so sweet that it even muffles the cacophony of crickets. The water flows all over, making the forest green and beautiful.⁴⁴ Environmental narratives of this saccharine variety also show faith in the sacredness of the totality: all trees, birds, and beasts are pious living entities born in the transcendental abode of Vrindavan to give pleasure to the Lord and His eternal associates, the boy-cowherds.⁴⁵ Examples of soothing narratives offering images of complete environmental and spiritual salvation abound in the region.

Creating a place environmentally also simultaneously involves a defence of the customs, traditions, and values of that place. So the references to Vrindavan and Brajmandala cover ground which goes beyond environmental regeneration: in order to understand the significance of local forests, we must understand customs that were prevalent in ancient Braj. Norms practised in ancient times must be outlined so that we truly understand the principles and rules of present-day society.⁴⁶ A history comes into being: the Braj region was attacked by outsiders during the Middle Ages. Muslim invaders plundered and ravaged Mathura. As a result, many pilgrim places disappeared and many of the area's norms and traditions passed into oblivion.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Mahanidhi Swami, *Appreciating Sri Vrindavana Dhama*, Vrindavana, ISKCON, 1991, pp. 18–19.

⁴⁶ Banwari, *Pancavati: Indian Approach to Environment*, Delhi, Shri Vinayaka Publications, 1992, pp. 65–6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

In the same breath it is concluded that 'Vrindaban is a unified symbolic entity with no demarcation between sacred and secular components as found in most other pilgrimage towns. It is a singular sacred space, perceived by pilgrims as the place of Krishna's activities or *lilas*.'⁴⁸

The Politics of Place: Power to Imagination

Environmental practice is sometimes animated less by concern for an all-encompassing whole than by the desire to defend a specific and particularly valued place.⁴⁹ It has been argued that the symbol of place politics is the colour green. Place politics is based on the control of land, space, and nature.⁵⁰ A certain attachment to special places, sites, landscapes, and environmental projects is an important strategy in the struggle against environmental destruction, displacement, and pollution.

However, what goes unnoticed in the above view is the fact that the appeal to protect a particular place often also contributes to a fresh creation of its specific political identity, and that this new identity may have a colour quite other than green. The historian of place and nature Simon Schama has persuasively argued that inherited landscape myths and memories share two common characteristics: their surprising endurance through time, and their power to shape contemporary meanings and institutions.⁵¹ He shows that landscapes are imagined as unique, and that notions of belonging and identity associated with them are perceived as internal and exclusive. Place politics and its imagery can thus become powerful elements in environmental

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁹ For details, see Douglas Torgerson, 'Images of Place in Green Politics: The Cultural Mirror of Indigenous Traditions', in Frank Fischer and Maarten A. Hajer (eds), *Living with Nature: Environmental Politics as Cultural Discourse*, London, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 186–203. They argue how in practice the ecological sensibility of the green movement is not only concerned with nature in general but also attuned to a defence of place.

⁵⁰ James O'Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*, New York, The Guilford Press, 1998, p. 296.

⁵¹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, London, HarperCollins 1995, p. 15.

narratives because they include a propensity to combine geographical belonging with complex stories of extraordinary characters and religious-cultural symbols. The place empowers those who belong to it, those whose being and living are mapped by it.

The imagination of sacred places can also be rendered clouded and ambiguous.⁵² It can refer to a supreme or ultimate subject—for example, to primeval nature. Such ambivalence can give place imagination a new form of political strength, allowing it to become a *cause célèbre*. It is this ambivalence, and not just the actual programmes and campaigns of afforestation and cleanliness, which have become the core form and function of the Vrindavan Project. For a larger picture of the project and its relationship with sectarian Hindu politics, one needs to look at precisely what meanings the project has endowed to this selected 'place'. How these connotations have been articulated in the deeper layers of power and politics also requires scrutiny, since it is in these layers that the outlines of the project become clear.

During colonial times Mathura district was known as Muttra. In 1803 it was included within British territory, and in 1832 the city of Mathura became a local administrative and government unit. It was part of the North-West Provinces, Agra Division, and then from 1877 it was part of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. In 1950 it became part of the new state of UP. However, in the mythical and religious universe, Vrindavan, Mathura, and the surrounding areas of Braj harbour a unique and different history. Braj refers less to an area or region with clearly defined boundaries, and more to the country where Krishna grazed his cattle and where all the sacred places associated with his childhood can be located. This mythical and religious perspective is followed up in the continuous efforts of environmentalists towards developing an expanding sacred geography for their conservation project—a region which is governed by the Supreme, a region where the social and political should be based on

⁵² Jozef Keulartz, 'Engineering the Environment: The Politics of "Nature Development"', in Fischer and Hajer (eds), *Living with Nature*, pp. 83–102. He uses these terms to explain the politics of nature development in the Netherlands, which is no longer meant to protect and conserve existing nature but to produce new nature.

the *Manu Smriti*, a region where the human self has to merge with a divine system. It is here that Vrindavan becomes Brajbhoomi, which can then be transformed into a call for the protection of the centre of ancient Indian culture. The transformation of region into sacred ecological location is accomplished by the mystification and Hinduization of the region. In many of the descriptions, Vrindavan is equal to Vraj, and Vraj could be anything and everything. Traditionally, it seems to have been believed that Brajmandala was spread over an area of 84 *kosa*, that is, about 168 miles. Even today, this area of 84 *kosa* has great significance, despite the Braj region having spread much beyond these bounds and the population of the people speaking Braj having spread over a much larger area.⁵³ Imagining and extending the sacred boundaries of Vrindavan and Mathura sometimes involves wonderful narrative deviousness in the construction of an origin myth:

Information about places like Brajmandala kept travelling from one place to the other through persons engaged in transactions . . . The town of Madurai in Tamilnadu constitutes a very obvious example of this. The town's real name is Madhura. For a short time when there were agitations against Sanskrit and the northern culture, people started saying that the Tamil Madhura had nothing to do with the Mathura of Brajmandala. But slowly these misunderstandings are being clarified . . . The Mathura of Brajmandala is also Madhura and the reason for the change in the nomenclature is that, in the course of time, Madhura was distorted to Mathura just as Tamil Madhura has changed to Madurai. The cultural and spiritual centres of the North like Mathura and Ayodhya have always been regarded and emulated as models, and there is nothing surprising in this. We find Mathura and Ayodhya being established not only in different parts of India but also in different regions of the world.⁵⁴

The Vrindavan Project's relationship with Krishna's birthplace, a site heavily politicized by the Hindu Right, becomes a natural reference.

⁵³ WWF-India and Vrindavan Conservation Project, *Invitation*, circulated in Vrindavan, 29 March 1997, p. 67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

as explained in 'Restoring the Forests of Krishna' by Ranchor Prime: 'Vrindavan lies at the focus of Vraj, the region where Lord Krishna lived. The whole region has been worshipped for thousands of years. It falls just inside the "golden triangle", stretching from Delhi south to Agra and west to Jaipur in Rajasthan, which was the setting for many of the events recorded in the Mahabharata, the epic history of ancient India. Mathura, Krishna's birthplace, seven miles south-west of Vrindavan, is one of India's oldest cities.'⁵⁵ Sewak Sharan, a leading participant in the WWF-India project, says: 'Sri Vrindavan area is not a small place and a city. It is an ancient place of worship—a temple of worship. For the integrity of Indian spirituality and culture, it is necessary to protect its original nature and environment—the Krishna, the Mathura, the birth place—in its entirety.'⁵⁶ It is thus that a 'new' Vrindavan emerges in the project period. Sewak Sharan further observes: 'The sylvan resort of Radha and Krishna is the foremost centre for understanding the synergy between man, nature and spiritualism. Linked to such deep spiritual and religious traditions, this sacred place is not a township but a *van mandir* (forest-temple). Restoring the splendour of Vrindavan's sacred ecology and its ancient cultural and religious identity is essential in the interests of mankind. Till about AD 1800, Vrindavan's environment was serene and peaceful.'⁵⁷ Along with this synergy, Sewak Sharan adds: 'Since childhood, Vrindavan gives a different kind of religious samskar. It is the samskar of being different and unique, being conscious of cleanliness and purity and living harmoniously with nature. We know God and nature are the same. God is behind nature's wisdom and natural wisdom is superior to human wisdom. The basic principle of environment conservation is not to break the cycle of nature.'⁵⁸

A place is turned into a central command area, a vital nerve system

⁵⁵ Prime, *Hinduism and Ecology*, p. 105.

⁵⁶ WWF-India, *Brij Vrindavan Sanrakshan* (Protection of Brij Vrindavan), background paper of a conference on the same subject in Vrindavan, 8 April 1998, n.p.

⁵⁷ Sewak Sharan 'Hir Kinkar', 'Conservation of Vrindavan's Identity', in *Report of Twenty Fifth Public Hearing*, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Interview with Swami Sewak Sharan in Vrindavan, 30 August 1999.

for its believers. Contested histories are homogenized to become a major reference point for future revival. These acquire an unquestionable authority. 'Friends of Vrindavan' is a registered charity. It has British and Indian trustees, with offices in London and Vrindavan. It works in partnership with WWF-India and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. Michael Duffy of this organization says: 'Vrindavan is one of the world's richest, living and pristine culture. It is like Rome and Jerusalem and is, in fact, better than them. It is the homeland of Krishna, the cradle of India's past and the key to her future. It is a focus for understanding sacred values and sacred cultural traditions. It is a place for unconditional love, service and sacrifice.'⁵⁹ Place imagery also becomes necessary because of its usefulness in combining geographical belonging with varied narratives of human exploits and cultural-political groups. Anoop Sharma of Vrindavan says: 'Vrindavan symbolizes the close proximity of Hindu religion with environment. Here, Hindu religion, Hindu organizations, and the environment can always go together. That is why the Vrindavan Forest Revival Project was inaugurated on *devathan ekadasmī* in 1991 and Rajmata Gayatri Devi of Jaipur *gharana* was called for the inauguration.'⁶⁰ At the same time: 'Indian culture is a Vedic culture and Vedic culture is a forest-based culture. This Vedic culture has been expressed by Krishna through his birth and through various messages in Vrindavan and Braj. Even today, Braj consciousness is the only way to save world environment and to construct human culture.'⁶¹

New political moves too come into play. Srivatsa Goswami of the Sri Chaitanya Prema Sansthana and a leading member of the advisory committee of the WWF project from its beginning, visualizes a new power relation flowing from the glory of Vrindavan: 'Vrindavan and Krishna show the power of religion. Religion is the dark horse all over the world. Religious power runs supreme over economic power

⁵⁹ Interview with Michael Duffy of 'Friends of Vrindavan', in Vrindavan, 28 August 1999.

⁶⁰ Interview with Anoop Sharma (in Vrindavan), Project Officer, Vrindavan Conservation Project, 24 August 1999.

⁶¹ Interview with Anup Sharma in Delhi, 12 August 1999.

and the power of the bureaucracy. Humanity and its various facets drive through this power. Power and Politics are two legs on which our culture stands. We have to streamline the religious power through many of these works.⁶² Such moves to extend the boundaries of Krishna and Vrindavan through the conservation project also suggest that the existing environmental boundaries are not seen as sufficiently

ब्रज रक्षक सेना

चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र के संरक्षण एवं संवर्धन के लिए संगठित हुआ

ब्रजवासियों का संगठन

लक्ष्य

1. चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र को श्रीवैकुण्ठेश्वर गालाजी व वैष्णव देवी जीशं रक्षण की तरह सुदृढ़, सुव्यवस्थित व सुविधासंपन्न क्षेत्र बनाने का प्रयास करना।
2. चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र में आने वाली प्राकृतिक व सांस्कृतिक धरोहरों का विनाश रोकना और उनके संरक्षण के लिए सार्वजनिक सहयोग का आवाहन तैयार करना।
3. चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र में आपसी रजिश और फिजूल की हिरासत रद्द कर युवा ऊर्जा को इस क्षेत्र में अव्यवस्था फैलाने वालों के विरुद्ध से जाना का प्रयास करना।
4. चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र के बहुसंख्यक कृषक व श्रमिक वर्ग के लिए सम्मानपूर्ण जीवन जीने योग्य हालात पैदा करना।
5. चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र की युवा शक्ति को सफेदपोश विक्रमों (सरकारी नौकरियों) के माह से मुक्त करा कर आर्थिक स्वातंत्र्य के लिए प्रेरित करना जो उसका माहिल तैयार करना।
6. जो हालात पैदा करना कि व्यापारी व औद्योगिक वर्ग विनाशकारी प्रथाओं से निजा आने की इमानदारी से जी सके।
7. चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र के हर वर्ग को यह अहसास दिलाना कि हमारा ब्रजमंडल के हालात सुधारने कोई पाकिस्तानी या चीनी नहीं आया है बल्कि हम ही कुछ करना होगा। ताकि हमारी संतानें सुख से जी सकें।
8. चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र में निष्ठा से भजन करने वाले साधु, संन्यासी और वैष्णवों को रखाने वालों को सही रास्ते पर लाना।
9. चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र में तीर्थ यात्रा या पर्यटन के लिए आने वाले पर्यटकों की सुख-सुविधाओं की भाकूल व्यवस्था करना। साथ ही उनके शांतिपूर्ण जीवनसाधन, मन और धन से काबिल करने के लिए प्रेरित करना।

सैनिक कौन बन सकता है ?

हर वह ब्रजवासी जो अपनी मातृभूमि से प्यार करता है। जो अपने दैनिक जनकल्याण के अनिवार्य चौरासी कोस ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र के लिए भी अपनी शक्ति अर्पण करने के लिए तैयार है। जो अपने अंगुष्ठमाला में रह कर कर्म करने का तैयार है। जो यह मानता है कि कर्म में ही उसका अधिकार है, फल की उसे शिकायत नहीं। जो दूसरों को सुधारने के साथ स्वयं भी सुधारने को तैयार है।

Fig. 5.1: A Pamphlet of the Braj Rakshak Sena

⁶² Interview with Srivatsa Goswami in Vrindavan, 27 August 1999.

ध्वज : केसरिया ध्वज

समूहगान : नृसिंह आरती

आध्यात्मिक ग्रंथ : भगवत् गीता

शुल्क : कृष्णभक्ति

शपथ : हर सैनिक निम्न शपथ लेगा:

मैं स्वेच्छा से ब्रज रक्षक सेना का सैनिक बन रहा हूँ। मैं ब्रज रक्षक सेना के उद्देश्यों की प्राप्ति के लिए समर्पित हूँ। इन्हें प्राप्त करने के लिए मैं अपने भी त्याग करने को तैयार हूँ।

मैं ऐसे या पद के लालच से विचलित हुए बगैर पूरी निष्ठा से गौराजी वसुन्धरा ब्रजमंडल क्षेत्र की सेवा करूंगा।

मैं सेना के सभी नियमों व अपने सेना नायकों के सगतन सहित सभी आदेशों का पालन करूंगा।

मैं जाति, धर्म, भाषा, क्षेत्र, लिंग व संप्रदाय के भेद से ऊपर उठकर हर मानव के कल्याण के लिए कार्य करूंगा।

मैं अपने जीवन से हर किस्म के नशे, व्यभिचार व जुआखोरी जैसे अपनों का (यदि है तो) यथाशीघ्र परित्याग करने का प्रयास करूंगा।

यदि अपरिहार्य न हो तो मैं तीव्र हत्या पर आधारित तामसी गोलाबाजी को परित्याग करूंगा।

मैं भारत की महान् संस्कृति के प्रति आस्थावन् रहते हुए अपने जीवन व इसका यथा संभव पालन करूंगा।

मैं अपने परिवार व समाज के बुजुर्गों का सम्मान करूंगा।

मैं परमपिता परमेश्वर से, इस तपोभूमि पर तप करने वाले ऋषि-मुनियों से व राष्ट्र के प्रति जीवन बलिदान करने वाले शहीदों से विनम्रतापूर्वक अपनी दुर्बलताओं को स्वीकार करता हूँ। वे मुझे सिंह सा पौरुष, बगुले सा त्याग, काल री घेदा, श्वान री निदा व राष्ट्रभक्ति देने की कृपा करें।"

Fig. 5.2: Oath Taken by Members of the Braj Rakshak Sena

conducive; they need to be re-situated according to the political configurations of a place. This finds resonance in the voices of Hindu sectarian politics: 'Vrindavan conservation is not only about Vrindavan, but also about the way we see Mathura, the birthplace of Krishna and the whole region. For us, the conservation is an effort to restore the ancient temples, forests, rivers, and fruits to our Hindu

devotees.⁶³ The VHP decided to constitute a Braj Rakshak Sena in the same period. The area of concern for this Sena became the Chaurasi Kos Brajmandal⁶⁴ Chetra. One of its main aims was 'to stop the destruction of the environmental and cultural tradition of the region and to mobilise people for the conservation.'⁶⁴

Krishna as Environmentalist

Krishna, one of the greatest figures in Hindu mythology, has been much afflicted by the vicissitudes of history.⁶⁵ Various texts dealing with him emphasize one or other aspect of his character, these being often the products of widely separated eras. As such, his life story has also assumed a new tinge under the influence of political, social, and religious upheaval.⁶⁶ A range of factors lie behind his various transformations and dilations—sectarian rivalries, the impact of bhakti doctrines, the reworkings of symbolism, mythological assimilations, changed political environments, and upsurges of anti-Brahminism.⁶⁷ Viewing the Krishna myth in a colonial context, Sudipta Kaviraj argues that the novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Krishna ought to be seen as a Sorelian myth, an ideal condensation of energies, a focus of 'national-popular' mobilization by the unremitting use of metaphors and myths. Here, Krishna is transformed from a lovable popular figure of eroticism, excess, transgression, and playfulness to a classic figure—calm, poised, rational, perfect, irreproachable. From a god of playful villagers and their folk festivals and a god who has helped them sort out small and everyday problems, he has been transformed into the supreme deity of a dependent nation, the god who helped them cross,

⁶³ Interview with Ram Swarup Sharma in Vrindavan, 18 August 1999.

⁶⁴ VHP, *Braj Rakshak Sena* (Braj Protection Army), pamphlet distributed in Vrindavan, n.d.

⁶⁵ Krishna Chaitanya, *The Betrayal of Krishna: Vicissitudes of a Great Myth*, Delhi, Clarion Books, pp. 15–45.

⁶⁶ Asha Goswami, *Krsna-Katha and Allied Matters*, Delhi, Y.R. Publications, 1984, pp. 20–35.

⁶⁷ Asha Goswami, *The Krsna Legend: A New Perspective*, Delhi, Y.R. Publications, 2001, pp. 1–8.

nullify, reject, and transcend the historic indignity of subjection.⁶⁸ Krishna can thus be reinvented quite quickly by the requirements of historical circumstance; an intelligentsia, it is apparent, can manufacture a classic tradition for itself in a matter of a few years when there is an audience willing, receptive, and hungry for a new messiah. What matters in this invention of tradition, far from its non-existence and non-continuity in real history, is its convincing appearance of the contrary—of having always been there.⁶⁹

Of the many descriptions that flow into the Krishna story as it swells over to the environmentalists, we also see an environmentalist Krishna created by romanticized poetic narrations and arguments. These usually follow a simple and uncomplicated formula: environmental motives are added on to his life and deeds. It is stated that Vrindavan and its surroundings resound with the tales of 'Sri Krsna'. Most of these tales are descriptions of various lilas of 'Sri Krsna' amidst nature and have environmental, spiritual, and philosophical undercurrents.⁷⁰ This is not a single voice, nor an individual's creation. Through a series of writings and speeches by environmentalists it becomes the collective argument with many outlines and manifestations. Sometimes, at the heart of it stand Sri Krishna and Radha Rani, the eternal pair representing *purusa* and *prakriti*, dual aspects of the primal force that permeates the universe. In their love and dalliance we find a powerful symbol of divine beauty and power, and into their dance we are drawn not only by cowherd youths and maidens but also by cows, birds, rivers, and plants.⁷¹

At other times, Krishna is Destroyer of Evil and Protector of the Weak. The killing of Kansa is the principal event in projecting this

⁶⁸ Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Myth of Praxis: The Construction of the Figure of Krishna in Krishnacaritra*, Occasional Papers on History and Society, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1987, pp. 55–89.

⁶⁹ Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 73.

⁷⁰ Banwari, *Pancavati*, p. xv.

⁷¹ Karan Singh, 'Foreword', in Anna McDowall and Arvind Sharma (eds), *Vignettes of Vrindavan*, New Delhi, Books and Books, 1987, p. vii.

aspect, with other less important events—like Kalia Mardana, Pootana Moksha, and the slaying of the Horse Demon Keshi—are built up through various stages of his life. Each of these events has a specific geographic association with Brajbhoomi, with Mathura, apart from being the place of Krishna's miraculous birth, playing a central role as the venue of the killing of Kansa. This image is complemented by his personality as the *sarathi* (charioteer) who guides people through worldly crises by outlining the canons of relationship between man and the cosmos, and who propounds *dharma yudha* for self-preservation. This aspect of Krishna is developed through the central event of Geethopadesha, which remains at a conceptual, classical, and metaphysical level, and geographically outside Brajbhoomi, in Kurukshetra.⁷²

The ideal of an environmental god and his absoluteness is often emphasized. Krishna here represents the supreme ideal who can give unity to religion and tradition, past and present, 'the symbol of environmental purity and beauty',⁷³ the ultimate environmentalist who held up Govardhan for everyone, the great role model for present times.⁷⁴ At the heart of this adoration of an environmentalist Krishna is Krishna's land, the Hindu's Jerusalem and Mecca: 'Krishna is the key to the world. His land has a power like Jerusalem and Mecca. Krishna emphasized water harvesting and the way people could adapt to their landscape.'⁷⁵ He can simultaneously serve as an icon for all time. Srivatsa Goswami says:

Vrindavan is sending us a message today, a message it has been sending out down the corridors of time for thousands of years. It is that, to keep the flame of environmental conservation alive in human consciousness, we need an icon. Krishna loved the *tamal* tree, He considered *Kadamba* unique. Mango groves were His favourite places. These became a part of the environmental iconography, a part of the

⁷² Ravindran and Team, *Vrindavan*, p. 3.

⁷³ WWF-India, *Vrindavan Forest Revival (Brochure 2)*.

⁷⁴ Interview with Michael Duffy in Vrindavan, 29 August 1999.

⁷⁵ Interview with Robyn Beeche of 'Friends of Vrindavan', in Vrindavan, 27 August 1999.

message that had gone forth from the groves here for ages and were nurtured by our sages. Vrindavan evolved as a centre of celebration of divine presence and consciousness amidst Nature's splendour.⁷⁶

After the initial environmental celebrations are over, a systematic manipulation of Krishna's figure is apparent: there is a constant shifting of his centre of activity from that of a lover, to an erotic environmentalist, to a killer purifier. In Sewak Sharan's view, his environmentalist and heroic-political virtues fuse:

In ancient times, Krishna came to undo some evils of Brajbhoomi. Kansa and his terror were the greatest evil, as he was the enemy of Braj. Krishna destroyed the evil by environmental methods: by blocking the supply of vegetables, fruits, and milk, and by killing all the messengers of Kansa who came to terrorize the people. We have to again arouse Krishna to eliminate present-day evils: we have to kill the enemies. Krishna also emphasized the importance of physical strength and He never used any weapon other than *lathis*. To fight the perpetrators of pollution in Vrindavan, we also need to be physically strong and mentally clean.⁷⁷

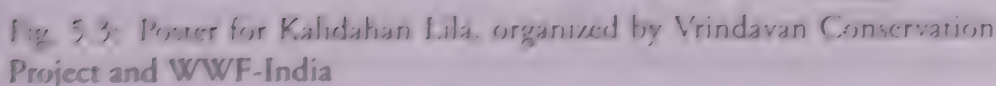
Ranchor Prime affirms this ideal: 'Krishna overcomes the demon Kaliya, who was poisoning the Yamuna, with the result that trees and animals were dying. Krishna wrestled with the demon and subdued it, saving the region from the effects of poisoned water. This is the image of Krishna as an environmentalist.'⁷⁸

Statements of the wars fought by Krishna against Jarasandh, Srgala, Hamsa, Angas, Vangas, Kalingas, Karusas, and Vatsyas, the weapons he used in these battles—the *chakra* (discus), the bow, the *kaumodiki gada* (mace)—and the death of various asuras or demons at his hands appear as regular reference points in the conservation efforts of such environmentalists. The asuras destroyed by Lord Krishna represent wicked people. These evil asuras symbolize the

⁷⁶ *Report of Twenty Fifth Public Hearing*, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Interview with Swami Sewak Sharan in Vrindavan, 30 August 1999.

⁷⁸ Ranchor Das (Ranchor Prime), 'Reviving the Forests of Vrindavan', *Rel. & to Godband*, vol. 26, September–October 1992, p. 31.



Local Hindu political leaders are enabled by all this to come into the picture and present themselves as committed to the cause of

²¹ WWF-India and Vrindavan Conservation Project, *Invitation*

environmental conservation in Vrindavan. Their commitments are couched in a political language centred on Krishna the warrior who needs to be called upon to restore the ancient glory of Hindu society. The politicians are akin to priests who must do the calling. Ideologies and language of community, caste, religion, war, and enemy are all deployed in these speeches to mobilize audiences, and by political parties to legitimize this way of 'doing' and 'participating' in the conservation efforts. By the manufacture of this ideological symbiosis, environmentalism meshes seamlessly with sectarian Hindu politics.

For Ram Swarup Sharma, the local BJP MLA, Sri Ram and Sri Krishna have been sources of inspiration for humankind through all time. Sri Krishna is the character who inspires devotees to break the chains of difficulty shackling them—i.e. political, social, legal, and human systems. The environmental Krishna, he says, calls us to restore the ancient glory and landscape of not only his birthplace but also of the region beyond. He also argues that Krishna's relationship with the ecology of various Hindu places provides a powerful ground on which to achieve victory over enemies.⁸¹ This environmental vindication of Krishna by certain local Hindus is only for the purpose of blaming the 'other'. Dr Manoj Mohan Shastri, a well-known Bhagavat-Bhusan in Vrindavan who is active in Hindu religious activities, emphasizes the environmentalist Krishna as a symbol of liberation from all kinds of pollution: 'For a pollution-free society, Krishna had swallowed Kaliya. He killed Trinavat and asked for the practice of worshipping Indra to be stopped. Whether it is a material or an environmental crisis, or a crisis of foreigners and kafirs, Krishna will protect all of us. He protected us from the tyranny of Kansa. The way Lord Ram is liberating the country from the shackles of misrule, Krishna will liberate us from the remaining pollution.'⁸² Jagdish Sharma, Acting-President, VHP, Vrindavan, takes this further:

In Vrindavan, everybody sees Krishna as a great social and political reformer. He was the one who lifted the Govardhan hills, who built a dam with just the flick of a finger. Only an extremely strong person

⁸¹ Interview with Ram Swarup Sharma in Vrindavan, 18 August 1999.

⁸² Interview with Dr Manoj Mohan Shastri in Vrindavan, 30 August 1999.

like him could decide to destroy a genealogy. He was an icon whose one call was the last word for the people. Nobody is more prudent than Him; nobody is as great a warrior as He. His different images are one, and are complementary with each other. There is no contradiction between Krishna as a lover, a warrior, and an environmentalist. Even God Ram had to bear weapons, but Krishna could do whatever He wanted to even without weapons. We need icons like Krishna to solve all the problems of Hindu society in this region. His image of immense power and force is needed today to strike fear in the hearts of opponents.⁸³

Krishna here is a continuously conscious construction and reconstruction, instrumental for beliefs, values, and information needed for specific politico-environmental ends. The dominant imagery of his power works primarily through the transformation of meanings, semantic extensions, and analogical (ab)uses. The narratives encompass varied field of activities and are targeted to influence events, behaviour, and perceptions well beyond any specific environmental arena.

Religious and Social Mappings through Environmental Ills

Given the varying cosmologies and changing symbolisms associated with Vrindavan and Krishna, we can look also at the deployment of environment and conservation as the context through which cultural constructions of 'good' and 'bad' in terms of gender, family, and social systems are created and recreated. The environment and conservation project in Vrindavan draws on and brings together two sets of overlapping concepts: environmental 'goods' and 'bads', and their social mappings and performances.

Caste comes into the picture in relation to the sewage system in Vrindavan. It is said that before 1970 the traditional latrine method was in vogue here, by which the waste was supposedly recycled into the fields as fertilizer. It goes without saying that to make this possible Dalits had to carry 'night soil' (human excreta) on their heads and

⁸³ Interview with Jagdish Sharma, Acting President, VHP, in Vrindavan, 2 August 1999.

perform other related cleaning-up jobs. The modern sewage system was designed after 1970 to treat the sewage—so that it could be safely dumped into the river Yamuna! However, the main line, which would have connected toilets all over the town, was never completed and the treatment plant never saw the light of day. Consequently, sewage is everywhere in the city, overflowing into the streets, gathering in low spots, dumped into the river. Ranchor Prime argues that the traditional method of waste disposal should return. When making his case, he goes to the *Manu Smriti*: ‘One should not cause urine, stool or mucus to enter water. Anything mixed with these unholy substances, or with blood or poison, should never be thrown into water.’⁸⁴ He accuses Indians of becoming enamoured with new Western technology and applying it inappropriately, in the process forgetting their ancient and time-tested technology appropriate to the situation, and ignoring venerable injunctions such as those found in *Manu Smriti*.⁸⁵ He points out underlying causes for the widespread abandoning of traditional Hindu values and technology, citing centuries of Muslim and British rule as detrimental to traditional Hindu culture and practice: ‘For 800 years Muslims ruled from Delhi. The whole surrounding region, including Vrindavan, bears the deep impression of this rule, which did nothing to foster Hindu culture, and at times bitterly suppressed it. Then the British, with their more subtle form of tyranny, made Hindus second-class citizens in their own land. The effect of this subjugation has been to drain the enterprising spirit, the self-determination and inner resourcefulness from a people who had their affairs run for them by outsiders for longer than most nations or cultures have endured.’⁸⁶ Meat-eating is identified as a serious ecological problem. And again the *Manu Smriti* is cited as prohibiting the eating of meat because the butcher, vendor, cook, and consumer are all murderers and have to reap bad karmic consequences.⁸⁷

In a background paper prepared by the WWF for a workshop to analyse and plan Vrindavan’s conservation, it was said that Radha

⁸⁴ Prime, *Hinduism and Ecology*, pp. 109–12.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

and Krishna fought against urban culture and established a human-nature harmony in the form of a village system. From their childhood, they launched a campaign for the re-establishment of spiritual, natural, social, and economic values in society.⁸⁸ These values are also listed in the background paper and include the following: 'pure married life is the basis of a strong and organised human society'; and 'separate lust from love making'. The solutions suggested to various problems include 'restriction on electricity'; 'total ban on non-vegetarian food, liquor, tea, smoking'; 'removal of hospitals, factories, modern

विश्व प्रकृति निधि, भारत

धार्मिक पर्यावरणीय आन्दोलन



मान्यवर,

विश्व प्रकृति निधि-भारत, देश में पर्यावरण संरक्षण हेतु अपने विभिन्न सेवा प्रकल्पों के माध्यम से कार्य कर रही है विश्व प्रकृति निधि द्वारा वृन्दावन एवं ब्रज के पर्यावरण संरक्षण हेतु वृन्दावन में वृन्दावन संरक्षण परियोजना चलाई जा रही है। हमारे धार्मिक ग्रन्थों में धर्म एवं पर्यावरण का अटूट सम्बन्ध दर्शाया गया है। धर्म एवं पर्यावरण के इस सम्बन्ध को आन्दोलन का स्वरूप प्रदान कर जन-जन तक पहुँचाने के उद्देश्य से वृन्दावन संरक्षण परियोजना द्वारा "आध्यात्मिक सत्संग" का आयोजन किया गया है इस सत्संग प्रवचन कार्यक्रम को बाबा श्री विश्वेश्वर दास जी (इंजीनियर बाबा) सम्बोधित करेंगे।

आप सभी से अनुरोध है कि अपने इष्ट मित्रों सहित पधार कर इस आध्यात्मिक पर्यावरणीय प्रवचन का लाभ प्राप्त करें।

प्रबन्ता : बाबा श्री विश्वेश्वर दास जी (इंजीनियर बाबा)

विशेष - इस प्रवचन कार्यक्रम के अन्त में सभी को एक-एक पौध भी प्रसाद के रूप में वितरित की जायगी

प्रवचन स्थल	दिनांक	समय
1 श्री राधाकृष्ण कृपा कुंज बैंक ऑफ इंडीया के पास	3 जून	सायं 5 से 6
2 श्रीमुदामा कुटी, बंगोवट वृन्दावन	4 एवं 5 जून	सायं 5 से 6

विश्व पर्यावरण दिवस

वृन्दावन संरक्षण परियोजना
छोटा मुंगेर मंदिर मथुरा मार्ग
वृन्दावन - 201121
☎ 442771

शीट नं० - 443284

Fig. 5.4: Satsang Organized by WWF-India

⁸⁸ WWF-India, *Brij Vrindavan Sannakshan* (Brij Vrindavan Conservation).

educational institutions, from the Vrindavan forest area'; and 'system to guarantee cleanliness and purity'.⁸⁹ Primarily involved in the defence of Vrindavan is the effort to protect and popularize a particular social and political system with which there is significant common ground connecting, intentionally and unintentionally, Green and Saffron. Jagdish Sharma says: 'Krishna embodies an ancient Vedic tradition. That tradition is to serve people selflessly, which should be continued at any cost. That tradition includes untouchability, which has to be maintained; otherwise everybody will start getting closer to Krishna. In the same manner, Krishna's tradition and teaching is that women should be properly clothed and they should never take bath in public.'⁹⁰ Conservation is mapped on to social norms and relationships. Social and political concerns seem part of the way in which the WWF and its associates understand environmental and cultural situations, resonant with purity, as well as with myth and social organization. It is not therefore a surprise to find, in such a context, WWF-India and the Vrindavan Conservation Project frequently organizing *satsang* and religious addresses by people like Baba Vishweshar Das (Engineer Baba) to create a pollution-free society and nation.⁹¹

*Environmental Justice and Injustice: Dalits
and Muslims*

Places and people are often inseparable: places exist in reference to people and the meanings of a place can be revealed only in terms of human responses to a particular lived environment.⁹² It has also been said that the use of the word 'place' highlights concerns about the interaction between people and environments which creates particular places.⁹³ Two points here complement each other: first, that

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Interview with Jagdish Sharma in Vrindavan, 2 August 1999.

⁹¹ WWF-India and Vrindavan Conservation Project, *Invitation*.

⁹² Francis Violich, 'Towards Revealing the Sense of Place: An Intuitive "Reading" of Four Dalmation Towns', in Donald Seamon and Robert Mugerauer (eds), *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 113.

⁹³ The journal *Ethics, Place and Environment*, University of London, UK, explains the use of the word 'place' in its title in this way.

places are created; and, second, that they are created through an interaction between people and environments.

Vrindavan has sizeable Dalit and Muslim populations even in the area covered by the WWF project. The Dalits here are mainly Chamar, Balmiki, Kori, Khatik, and Dhobi. They too are inseparable from the place and the project. If we wish to accept that they also have a sense of place, with a capacity for memory, experience, intentionality, and a sense of attachment to and identification with cultural values, we have to be prepared for an entirely different picture of the Vrindavan project—their picture.

It has been claimed that although varna categories are recognized in Vrindavan, they are not the primary concerns of the city. Vrindavan has not been seen as a place where normal social considerations are in effect, and perceptions of caste and hierarchy are stated to considerably differ here from what is generally accepted within the Indian situation. It is the opinion of the majority of Vrindavan residents, including most Brahmins, that a person's status in the town can properly be determined only by the quality of his devotion to Krishna. In effect, broadly, the structure of hierarchy in Vrindavan is not based upon a Brahmin/non-Brahmin opposition, but rather a devotee/non-devotee one.⁹⁴

However, at the heart of Vrindavan lies Kishorepura Valmiki *basti*, where Chowdhary Bhagwan Das Balmiki's family has been living for three generations. He claims that the famous Banke Bihari Mandir was built by the labour of his ancestors:

Since my childhood, I never ever felt anything special about Krishna and his land. It is being said that His supposed birth in Vrindavan itself has a special significance. However, how is this meaningful if we continue to be called *bhangi*, *chura* or *balmiki*. We have no role in the creation of Krishna and any related activities. We are only involved in cleaning up the dirt here and that gives us our bread. We are not considered a part of Hindu society, we cannot enter the temples, we cannot put up our kiosks to sell foodstuffs, we are not allowed to open juice shops, we cannot even rent a place.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Brooks, *Hare Krishnas in India*, pp. 68–71.

⁹⁵ Interview with Chowdhary Bhagwan Das Balmiki in Vrindavan, 18 August

Bhagwan was a part of the cleanliness and conservation drive of Friends of Vrindavan, a partner organization of the WWF. He narrates his experience:

The cleanliness drive was launched at six temple points. The 100-metre diameter of Banke Bihari Mandir was the starting place. However, the priests and the Krishna *bhakt*s there bitterly objected to our presence even 100 metres away, as according to them we *bhangis* were polluting the people, their ways and the *mandir*. The drive was stopped after their objection, when they started quarrelling.⁹⁶ In this environment, we do not want to live with Krishna, never mind the conservation in His name. Our condition is pathetic here. Wherever we get love and livelihood, we are ready to go there.⁹⁷

Charandas Jatav claims to be an *asli brajwasi* (authentic resident of Braj) as his family's seventh generation is at present in Vrindavan. His family received some temple land to build their house a long time ago. He says: 'We do not belong to Krishna. Thus, we do not believe in Him. We have this painful experience that however much we live with feelings of love and cooperation, we can never be incorporated into the Krishna fold. Brajbhoomi is for Brahmins. Neither forest destruction nor pollution, but the three Bs—Brahmins, Babajees and Bandars—are the real culprits for the problems of Vrindavan.'⁹⁸ Charandas has seen the WWF working near his colony. He continues: 'Plantation came here, but soon the plants dried up as there was nobody to water them. We were never a part of the Vrindavan Conservation Programme, as we were never considered a part of Krishna. We want to be away from the Krishna land, and are ready to

1999. In the course of twenty interviews with Dalits in Kishorepura, Khusurpura, Gandhinagar, Ganj Mohalla, Bagh Mohalla, and Gopinath Mohalla of Vrindavan, I could gather similar feelings with varied expressions and examples.

⁹⁶ For details, see *Amar Ujala*, Agra, 27 June 1997, which reported that the Balmikis were assaulted while they were cleaning the area near the temple.

⁹⁷ Interview with Chowdhary Bhagwan Das Balmiki in Vrindavan, 18 August 1999.

⁹⁸ Interview with Charandas Jatav in Vrindavan, 18 August 1999.

live in the forests if that can give us a livelihood with dignity.'⁹⁹ Hari Mohan Balmiki narrates a different experience: 'After taking bath, when I pray to the sun, I often remember Krishna, along with Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. I am also human. After work, I would also like to go to a Krishna temple and listen to Krishna *bhajans*, but I cannot do this. Even when I take a proper bath and dress up in clean clothes, I am not allowed in the temple and the *parikrama* area. I am completely defeated here.'¹⁰⁰

It thus appears that far from being a binding factor in Vrindavan conservation, Krishna seems an entity that is claimed by a few to the exclusion of many. In fact, Krishna is at one level one of the symbols of discord and resistance, the adoption of his image leading to the exclusion of certain groups from the conservation project. The Muslims of Vrindavan voice a similar feeling. Noor Mohammad, an ex-corporator, says: 'We have been living in this Krishna area for the last five generations. Krishna has been always a living factor here, but never a factor to rally around a certain section of the community for a specific purpose. The use of Krishna for the forest revival has no appeal to us and, in any case, that was never the intention. We are completely excluded.'¹⁰¹ Another Muslim resident of Vrindavan, Saiyed Ahmed, says: 'Krishna has come here in many forms in the aftermath of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. The sense of belonging to Krishna suddenly gets exposed to its connections to a particular politics. In this situation, how can one believe in the new, coming imageries?'¹⁰² And it is not only the Dalits and the Muslims who feel excluded: some of the people associated with the project assume that these same communities are a threat to the environment, and therefore lack what might be called 'ecological legitimacy'.¹⁰³ Thus, it is said: 'Muslims are also one of the main sources of pollution

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Hari Mohan Balmiki in Vrindavan, 19 August 1999.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Noor Mohammad in Vrindavan, 10 August 1999.

¹⁰² Interview with Saiyed Ahmed in Vrindavan, 10 August 1999.

¹⁰³ Ecological legitimacy is associated with environmental stewardship or the practice of caring for the land in a sustainable manner. For a detailed discussion, see K. Zimmerer, 'Social Erosion and Social (Dis)courses in

and environmental degradation of Vrindavan. They kill cows. They produce so much of waste in their living. They cross their boundaries.'¹⁰⁴

On a different plane, Dalits are largely seen as 'performing objects' in a romanticized way, located in a place to do certain duties. One environmentalist says: '*Sewa* and *sewak*, these two things are understood by everybody in Brajbhoomi. Unconditional love and sacrifice are a hallmark here. The only people who are the true *sewaks* are Balmikis and in our environmental drive, we are trying to demonstrate this on a wider scale.'¹⁰⁵ One gets an echo of this in Rakesh Das, a Balmiki, and many other Balmikis who work with Michael Duffy in Friends of Vrindavan. Says 32-year-old Rakesh: 'We are *sewaks*. Service—cleaning up the dirt—is our sacred duty, so that Krishna bhakts do not feel the dirt. We try hard to be faithful to our service. Wherever the bhakts put their feet, we wish to clean that area.'¹⁰⁶

Ecological legitimacy may be drawn from different sources and crafted in various ways. One source is to see one's own community and religion as inherently more sensitive to nature than others, whether or not this is in fact true. Thus the Congress politician Karan Singh, in his inaugural address at the 25th Public Hearing on Environment and Development in Vrindavan, on 16 September 1995, said: 'The Hindu tradition of reverence for nature and all forms of life represents a powerful force that needs to be revived in our contemporary context.'¹⁰⁷ In similar vein, Sri Chaitanya Prema Sansthana, WWF-India, and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, UK, organized a national programme 'to elevate and maintain the contributions of faiths on issues concerning land and conservation'.¹⁰⁸ Such discourses take further shape, in that they not only regard the characteristics of Hindus as unitary, fixed, and eternal, but use these to characterize the

Cochabamba, Bolivia: Perceiving the Nature of Environmental Degradation', *Economic Geography*, vol. 69, 1993.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Jagdish Sharma in Vrindavan, 2 August 1999.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Michael Duffy in Vrindavan, 28 August 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Rakesh Das in Vrindavan, 10 August 1999.

¹⁰⁷ *Report of Twenty Fifth Public Hearing*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Sri Chaitanya Prema Sansthana, *Invitation Letter*, 27 July 1997.

'other'. Devendra Sharma, Project Officer (Education), WWF-India, claims: 'When we tried to integrate religion and environment in Vrindavan, we found that the Hindus had a big heart. They were willing to accommodate any and everything, whereas this was not observed in the other community. A Muslim in Vrindavan will never go to the Banke Bihari Mandir, but a Hindu will go to a mosque.'¹⁰⁹



In the Hindu mythical and cultural universe, Krishna, Vrindavan, Mathura and the surrounding areas have a unique place. A complex history has been developing through the dynamics of culture, religion, democracy, politics, and the colonial and post-colonial state. This background contributes a great deal to the environmental project in Vrindavan. Environmentalists have used a ready treasure of cultural resources to facilitate their ideas and actions: they understand, interpret, and manipulate the place and the religion through the lens of a particular Hindu resource and the practices of caste and hierarchy. The emphasis on particular religious cults and symbols, Hindu pasts and traditions, Muslim invaders and British rule seems to have had an affinity with dominant understandings of Vrindavan's culture, community, and past. The character of Krishna and the place of Mathura and Vrindavan, with its elastic and borderless ritual status, have helped these environmentalists to define and redefine their works and words according to their Hindu and elite character. They have, on the one hand, transformed diversified understandings, knowledge, myths, epics, and religious histories into a fixed story, using them to promote a homogeneous and exclusive Hindu community. On the other hand, they have used and manipulated at their convenience the various faces of Krishna, offered by religious texts, cultural beliefs, and contemporary needs. By closely linking Krishna and Mathura to wider political contexts, environmental rhetoric here has shown an affinity to contemporary Hindu political interests, often creating a common language.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Devendra Sharma in Vrindavan, 29 August 1999.

Hindu sectarian politics has had an equally important effect on environmental religious discourse. Its politics has affected the ways in which religious and ecological cults are represented, places and regions identified, and programmes developed. Some of these changes are internalized by the environmental groups in their everyday life. The process of religious revivalism through environmentalism and vice versa seamlessly emphasizes upper-caste Hindu traditions of cleanliness and purity, Vedic culture, sacredness, faith and samskar, the *Manu Smriti*, the varna system, the strong and organized family, and 'pure' married life. Its language stresses the idioms of mandir, war, enemies, and Muslim invaders. In the Vrindavan environmental project Green and Saffron seem to have found a common language, symbolic meanings, and place affinities.

6

Conservative Environmentalism in Europe

It is we *Conservatives* who are not merely Friends of the Earth. We are its guardians and trustees for generations to come.—**Margaret Thatcher**, then prime minister of the UK and the leader of the Conservative Party, speaking at the annual dinner of the Royal Society, 27 September 1988

We are the true environmentalists!—**Franz Schonhuber**, former chairman of the *Die Republikaner*, a conservative party in Germany, 1990

The Swiss Democrats fight for a healthy, stable, and social living space for the people of Switzerland. The goal can only be reached, however, when further economic growth is avoided, immigration kept to a minimum, and environmental damage . . . repaired.—**The party programme of Swiss Democrats**, a right-wing political party in Switzerland, 1998

In any discussion of the environment in Europe, it should be remembered that in Western countries the word 'environment' connotes amenity and recreation. It does not necessarily have the same force as it does in India and other developing countries, since in the West only a minority of people are directly dependent on the actual resource-base; in the UK, for example, less than 2 per cent

of the people actually work in farming and agriculture, and even they work in highly mechanized and intensive ways. It is easy to present the environment here simply as an agreeable backdrop to people's lives; the vital relationship between the biosphere and a highly industrialized humanity has been for all practical purposes virtually effaced. In this sense, it is easier to present to the peoples of Europe the sense of pleasant spaces 'invaded' by immigrants; more so since the West (particularly the UK) has been at pains to eliminate all traces and scars of an industrialism which wrecked landscapes and lives in the early industrial era. The environment of Britain is like a gigantic crime scene from which the perpetrators have fled, leaving only grassy slopes where there were slag-heaps, plantations of trees where there were mills, and mines and parks where slum housing stood.

Though quite different from the Indian context, there is a great variety of political organizations and movements in Europe today, under the rubric of 'right-wing' and 'conservative', that are taking up environmental issues as one of their key concerns. They have different historical contexts and ideological roots. They are difficult to compare with each other without a deep contextualization of each of them. There is no universal conservative and right-wing ideology that exists for itself. However, they have articulated a wide range of concerns in the 1980s and 1990s, from environmental regulation, industrial pollution, local management, and preservation of nature parks to the 'polluter pays' principle and global warming. They have connected their environmental concerns with protection of the homeland and national identity, the maintenance of national ethnic homogeneity, the threat of immigration, and the need to follow not only the laws of nature but also those of culture, tradition, and community. Here attachment to the natural world, a sense of belonging, and the home-place are given a particular political meaning. Environmentalism merges with nationalism and builds the foundation for an exclusive and homogeneous ultra-nationalism.

It should not be thought, however, that 'environmentalism' is the sole concern of the Right. This is contested territory to which all political parties, Right and Left, lay claim, and each side has a plausible

narrative justifying its appropriation of this very sensitive ground. The environment, the resource-base of the earth, ecology, and planetary integrity do not belong to one side alone. Since the very concept is somewhat nebulous and has a quasi-spiritual dimension, it permits absorption of the issue into virtually any political ideology—although, naturally, it takes on the inflection of the one which asserts ownership. In the early twenty-first century, no political formation remains neutral or indifferent to the issue.

The claims of the Right are also challenged by the Red–Green alliance, which tells quite a different story. For the Left, the limits of global resources and the demands of economic growth without end raise the question of distribution and global equity, contesting the delusion underlying an endless economic expansion which argues that the rich must become much richer if the poor are to become a little less poor. Writers such as Rudolf Bahro and Andre Gorz, who have had a significant influence on the Left in Europe, were from the Left; and these were also pioneers of the Green Movement in Europe. There is still, in the idea of environmentalism, fluidity and openness; and the Greens are internationalists, diametrically opposed to the ultra-nationalism of the powerful Rightist movements in Europe. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the politics of globalism will, in future, reflect the conflict between ultra-nationalists and internationalists, since this struggle poses in more vibrant form the older struggles between Right and Left which have, for many people in the Western world, become archaic and incomprehensible.

This said, it is true that there exists a far-right version of the exaltation of nature, a belief in the unique distinction of the fatherland or motherland, which confers some distinctive (and superior) characteristics upon those favoured by being born there. This, together with its milder, centre-Right equivalent, must be taken seriously indeed, since it feeds much of the overt and covert racist, and more specifically anti-Islamic, rhetoric which has been widely deployed in Europe over the past decade. Here I only look very broadly at the Nazi attachment to ecology and some of the contemporary ecological concerns of Europe which lean towards the Right.

The Green Nazis and Contemporary Eco-Politics in Germany¹

Man must not fall into the error of thinking that he was ever meant to become lord and master of Nature. A lopsided education has helped to encourage that illusion. Man must realise that a fundamental law of necessity reigns throughout the whole realm of Nature and that his existence is subject to the law of eternal struggle and strife. He will then feel that there cannot be a separate law for mankind in a world in which planets and suns follow their orbits, where moons and planets trace their destined paths, where the strong are always the masters of the weak and where those subject to such laws must obey them or be destroyed. Man must also submit to the eternal principles of this supreme wisdom. He may try to understand them but he can never free himself from their sway.—Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Chapter 10

[It is] useful to know the laws of nature—for that enables us to obey them. To act otherwise would be to rise in revolt against heaven . . . As in everything, nature is the best instructor.—Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941–1945*

Hitler's attachment to a mystical sense of what it meant to be German focused upon the physical beauty of the countryside; and although this formed part of the Nazi ideology, it was neither the most fundamental component of it nor more than symbolically practised. In reality, the ideology was animated by hatred, especially of Jews, but also of other allegedly racially inferior groups, especially Slavs and gypsies. At the same time, the building up of an elaborate and effective war machine was a vast industrial enterprise, far from the bucolic imagery of hiking in pine forests.

Historical research on the role of environmental ideas and issues in the making of the Nazis, Hitler, and National Socialism has shown that within a complex ideological tangle, the environment became a

¹ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party'*, Buckinghamshire, The Kensal Press, 1985, p. 171. A chapter in the book is titled 'The Green Nazis'.

critical tool in the hands of the Nazis to define their version of national identity and regeneration. My argument is not intended to be teleological: there are no direct links between present-day conservative and far-Right groups on the one hand and Nazi ideology on the other, or between the environmental perspectives of these two groups. At the same time, by examining the context in which National Socialism defined its version of environmentalism, we can see that there exists a tradition and history of conservative environmentalism, and that environmental issues can—as we have seen already from our three Indian case studies—be taken up most successfully and innovatively by the most conservative and right-wing politics.

Germany is the birthplace of the science of ecology and the site of the emergence and prominence of Green politics. This nation has in addition been home to a peculiar synthesis of naturalism and nationalism forged under the influence of the Romantic tradition's anti-Enlightenment irrationalism. Two nineteenth-century figures exemplify this ominous conjunction: Ernst Moritz Arndt (1765–1860) and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1823–97).² Arndt mixed a dedication to the peasantry with fanatic nationalism and is acknowledged to be an early proponent of 'ecological' concerns in the contemporary sense. His attachment was specifically to the German landscape and the 'volk'. He was violently xenophobic and deeply influenced Wilhelm Riehl, whose loathing of industrialism and anti-semitic celebration of peasant values made him a pioneer of anti-urban nostalgia. The volkisch movement of the later nineteenth century, which preached a return to the land, also nourished the youth movement of the Weimar era, much of which was readily absorbed into the Hitler Youth. Their values mutated readily into a toxic mix of mysticism, anti-humanism, and the supposed order of nature—to deny which was vain and futile—and thence to a myth of racial supremacy and national salvation.

In her pioneering work, Anna Bramwell has traced the development of Green ideas among the Nazis, showing within a wealth of

² For further details, see Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*, Edinburgh, AK Press, 1995.

detail how Richard Walther Darre, an influential person in the party and later minister of agriculture in the Third Reich, articulated his economic and moral arguments to build the case for a locally based and self-sufficient economy.³ According to Darre, by living close to nature man guards against the bane of 'over-civilization'. It should, of course, be remembered that 'over-civilization' is also a code for rejecting the cosmopolitan (which here equals Jewish) way of life which was blamed for Germany's economic and social ills. As minister of agriculture, Darre proposed and promoted 'biological-dynamic agriculture', rejecting the logic of industrial and technological development. He hoped that in the post-war world a victorious Germany would be able to explore the practical implications of his theories.

Another scholar, Daniel Gasman, has drawn attention to the importance of Ernst Haeckel and the influence of monism on Hitler, especially through the Social Darwinism of Haeckel's disciple and biographer Wilhelm Bolsche, and of Haeckel's admirer the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen, with his glorification of nature and emphasis on distinctive elements in pre-Christian northern European culture.⁴ Gasman also mentions Hitler's interest in the book *Urwelt, Sage und Menschheit* (Primeval World, Saga and Humanity), written by the nature mystic Edgar Dacque, along with his general approval of ideas on the links between evolution, biology, and human culture. This points to sources out of which developed Hitler's belief in the preservation and maintenance of Germanic biological superiority. According to Gasman, Hitler's eugenics, anti-semitism, and conception of history developed extreme monist views to the effect that 'western civilization had obscured the true relationship between man and nature'.⁵ People like Lothar Schreyer, Ernst Haeckel, and Richard Walther Darre had an abiding influence on Hitler and Nazi ideology. These writers can help us understand how naturalistic, organic, rooted,

³ Ibid., pp. 54–74.

⁴ Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League*, New York, Macdonald and American Elsevier, 1971, pp. 125–30.

⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

and mystic views of nature and environmentalism often sit comfortably with conservative and right-wing politics.

Lothar Schreyer: *The Reich of the Earth*

One of the well-known writers and artists of his time, Schreyer produced plays and helped to direct stage productions at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg from 1911 to 1918. He founded an experimental expressionist theatre in 1918 called the *Sturm-Bühne*. From 1916 to 1928 he was the editor of a journal of the same name. In 1921 he was invited to teach at the Bauhaus, where he was head of a stage workshop. From 1924 to 1927 he taught at Der Weg, a Berlin art school, of which he was also the director for some time. Then he moved to Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, a publishing house, where he was the general editor from 1928 to 1931.

On the very day Hitler came to power, Schreyer converted to Roman Catholicism, a calculated, symbolic act. Preoccupied with Christian mysticism and folk ideas during the 1930s, he also supported the National Socialist ideology. He revived the old *Sturm-Bühne* as the *Kampf-Bühne* (Battle Stage) in Hamburg after the Second World War. He died in 1966, having in the course of his career articulated views of nature, art, and civilization—which to him were part of an all-embracing spiritual sphere. *Deutsche Landschaft: Eine Naturbetrachtung* (German Landscape: Contemplating Nature), *Über die Grenzen der Natur* (Beyond the Bounds of Nature), *Heilige Weltschau* (Divine World Revelation), and *Der Märchenwald* (The Fairytale Forest) are some of his writings that include his reflections on nature and the environment.⁶

For Schreyer, nature and the purification of man, soul, and nation go together: 'Consideration of nature purifies the human soul.'⁷ Nature needs to be recreated and reordered by men who have been purified

⁶ Brian Keith-Smith, 'The Cultural Impact of Green Thought under National Socialism: The Case of Lothar Schreyer', in Colin Riordan (ed.), *Green Thought in German Culture: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1997, pp. 74–6.

⁷ Lothar Schreyer, *Deutsche Landschaft: Eine Naturbetrachtung*, Hamburg, Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1932, p. 37.

by a community which prioritizes obedience and discipline.⁸ He praises the swastika, symbol of the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (German Workers' Front), as a sign of purification and asserts that the artist must serve the state, for 'the art of our state will pronounce the spiritual reality of our race, whose body is the people.'⁹ Such art would be based on *blut und boden* (blood and soil) and celebrate the heroic deeds of the German present. In his *Die bildende Kunst der Deutschen* (The Art of the Germans), Schreyer says that 'German man lives in the darkness and strives for the light. From time immemorial he wanders through the forests worshipping the spirits of light.'¹⁰ As for Germans today: 'We still go on wandering through the forest of our soul and feel ourselves bound to the woods of our homeland.'¹¹ *Deutsche Landschaft* is replete with eulogies to German landscapes—its mountains, woods, rivers and heaths, and the sea. In a section titled 'Supernatural Homeland', he says: 'The German landscape together with the German nation and its people, led and living in each other, are the Reich. It is a Reich of the earth, a Christian Reich of the German nation. Such a Reich pronounces the heavenly Reich, for in such a Reich hope, love and faith are the forces that with grace have taken hold of human life, which can no longer withstand them.'¹² Modern technology leads man away from the *Volksgemeinschaft* (community): 'Man wandered from nature into the city, from culture into civilization. And then came the great purifying trek that we call World War . . . The German landscape was almost completely preserved, the healing unity between the nature of our homeland and that of the human soul.'¹³

In the destruction wrought by the First World War, Schreyer sees the preservation of the German landscape. He believes it was a creative interplay between the German people and their landscape that

⁸ Lothar Schreyer, *Meister der Graphik*, Hamburg, 1948–9, p. 217.

⁹ Lothar Schreyer, 'Ausblick auf eine heroische Kunst', *Deutscher Wille*, August 1934, pp. 214–18.

¹⁰ Lothar Schreyer, *Die bildende Kunst der Deutschen*, Hamburg, 1931, p. 11.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lothar Schreyer, *Deutsche Landschaft*, p. 279.

¹³ Ibid., p. 21.

enabled Germany to win back its strength after losing the war in 1918. The German world lives when it wanders through the landscape and rediscovers its sense of community, helped by art, music, and literature to appreciate the harmonic principles in nature. Landscape becomes the basis on which he sculpts society, human behaviour, and religion, particularly Roman Catholicism. Nature becomes the means to purify man and culture; it becomes the logic that rationalizes allegiance to National Socialist causes. In 'Vom Landschaftserlebnis unserer Malerei' (On the Representation of Landscape in Our Painting), he remarks:

No art can be posited that does not construct its figures with the secret forces, which does not create life from the soil of our homeland. Landscape painting has in addition to this special task of proclaiming in the work of art the energies of the soil of our homeland, its particular moulding the secret that binds our soil and German man indissolubly together. For landscape is more than the outer face of nature which surrounds us with the sky, mountains, wood and meadows and all that is beautiful. Landscape is even more than the life that flows up towards us in continuous renewal from the soil. The forces of our human being are conjoined in a similar way in the landscape with the soil of our homeland. Landscape emerges in a communal unfolding of the forces of blood and soil. Landscape painting should proclaim these forces, their unfolding and their inner union, in which they alone can realize their own existence.¹⁴

Through the pathways of nature Schreyer also gets involved with party-inspired aesthetics: this realization is proclaimed in perhaps the most impressive way in the painting *German Soil*. While describing the picture Schreyer claims: 'In such an immense tension between nature and man, between blood and soil, the life of the people persists, and this tension produces a resonance, a harmony of a wonderful kind that man can only hear within himself whenever he listens attentively to the life of his native landscape.'¹⁵ Schreyer also uses nature to

¹⁴ Lothar Schreyer, 'Vom Landschaftserlebnis unserer Malerei', *Herdfeuer*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1935, p. 469.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 471–2.

support the National Socialist vision of Nordic man—a racially purified man from a purified homeland.

Ernst Haeckel: Ecology for Nazis

Another major influence on Hitler and the Nazis was Haeckel, an eminent German biologist, naturalist, philosopher, physician, and professor who discovered, described, and named thousands of new species, mapped a genealogical tree relating all life forms, and coined many terms in biology, including 'ecology'. It was he who centrally provided an ecological basis to the right-wing Nazi politics of his time. Haeckel promoted and popularized Charles Darwin's work in Germany. His published artwork *Kunstformen der Natur* (Artforms of Nature) includes over a hundred multi-colour illustrations of animals and sea creatures. His philosophical writings include *Die Welträtsel* (The Riddle of the Universe) and *Freedom in Science and Teaching*. His political beliefs were influenced by his affinity to the German Romantic movement. He believed that racial characteristics were acquired through interaction with the environment. In 1905 he founded a group called the Monist League to promote his religious and political beliefs. This group lasted until 1933 and included several notable members. Within its first five years the Monist League grew to 6000 members and organized local group meetings in localities all over Germany. It published a monthly journal, *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* (The Monist Century), which later became a weekly, as well as pamphlets and a youth magazine, *Sonne* (Sun). In 1911 an International Congress of Monism was held in Hamburg.

The Monist League combined outright atheism and a scientific view of nature with right-wing politics and ultra-nationalism. Opposed to all ideas of mankind's essential equality, the Monists embraced racism instead. They believed that a person's physical appearance truly shows inner qualities. Moreover, the individual is useful only within a context of subservience and usefulness to 'its own species and to the evolution of life in general'.¹⁶ The Monists gloried in the fact that

¹⁶ Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism*, pp. xvi–xvii.

they had no absolute ethics and that no objective values could be found in nature. They attacked Christianity's teaching of the unique and inviolable worth of each and every human being—derived from the idea of man's creation in the image of the transcendent personal God of the Bible—because this doctrine had 'mistakenly protected the weak members of society'.¹⁷

During the last year of his life Haeckel became a member of the newly formed Thule Gesellschaft, a secret, radical, right-wing organization which played a key role in the establishment of the Nazi movement. Other members of the Thule included future Nazis like Dietrich Eckart, Gottfried Feder, and Rudolf Hess. Hitler and Anton Drexler attended meetings of the Thule as guests.¹⁸ Haeckel and the Monists stood for authoritarian state power in a fascist-style corporate and racist state, and saw its evolutionary rationale in the societies of bees and ants. They embraced a return to brutality in human relations, especially in government policies towards the eugenically undesirable. For most Monists the main task of the state was to ensure the survival and reproduction of only the biologically fittest individuals.¹⁹

Haeckel elaborated a holistic view of man's symbiotic relationship with the natural world. Natural laws governed the workings of the natural world and human civilization alike. His views on nature conservation came close to Social Darwinism: only the strong—individuals, peoples, or nations, and those willing to fight—survived the constant upward struggle that characterized national evolutionary development. Nations, cultures, and peoples could, therefore, be categorized 'scientifically' into superior and inferior, with the latter being considered expendable and even worthy of destruction. According to Haeckel, ecology is a total science that interprets the natural as well as socio-political worlds, and also provides the basis for changing them. Man has no separate existence and identity from nature. He is not distinguished from the animals by a special kind of soul or any peculiar and exclusive psychic function, but only by a higher degree of psychic

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

activity, a superior stage of development: 'As our mother earth is a mere speck in the sunbeam in the illimitable universe, so man himself is but a tiny grain of protoplasm in the perishable framework of organic nature. [This] clearly indicates the true place of man in nature, but it dissipates the prevalent illusion of man's supreme importance and the arrogance with which he sets himself apart from the illimitable universe and exalts himself to the position of its most valuable element.'²⁰

Haeckel was bothered by the decline of the German nation and the natural world in face of the destruction wrought by materialism, foreign ideologies, and civilization. The solution he proposed was the establishment of a socio-political world based on the laws of nature: 'Civilization and the life of nations are governed by the same laws as prevail throughout nature and organic life.'²¹ The whole of organic nature on our planet exists only by a relentless war against all; the raging war of groups in human society is only a feeble reflection of the unceasing and terrible war of existence which reigns throughout the living world.²² Since the nation is not created but born out of nature, nations ought to reflect the natural division of humankind. Only a natural nation is a culturally and racially pure nation. With his firm belief in natural order, vigour, and purity, he sees a lower mental difference between animals and the lowest sorts of men than between the lowest and highest sorts of men. Therefore he suggests learning from the Spartans: 'Among the Spartans all newly born children were subject to a careful examination or selection. All those that were weak, sickly, or affected with any bodily infirmity, were killed. Only the perfectly healthy and strong children were allowed to live, and they alone afterwards propagated the race.'²³

²⁰ Ernst Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe*, New York, Harper, 1900, pp. 14–15.

²¹ Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation, Vol. I*, New York, D. Appleton, 1876, p. 11.

²² Ernst Haeckel, *Monism: The Confession of Faith of a Man of Science*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1895, pp. 73–4.

²³ Haeckel, *The History of Creation, Vol. I*, p. 170.

Richard Walther Darre: Of Blood and Soil

Called 'the Father of the German Greens' by his main biographer, Darre popularized the phrase 'blood and soil' and was a major figure in Nazi Germany, being prominent among those who brought nature and environmental issues into Nazi ideology and practice. Even today his theories inspire right-wing radicals and his writings are used by those who believe in the decadence of urban life and the nobility of self-sufficiency. Two of his major works are *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* (The Peasantry as Life Source of the Nordic Race, 1928), and *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (A New Nobility of Blood and Soil, 1934).

As a young German, Darre initially joined the Artamans, a volkish youth group committed to 'returning to the land'. Against this backdrop he began to develop the idea that the future of the Nordic race is linked to the soil. The idea came to be known as *blut und boden* (blood and soil). Darre went on to become an active Nazi, and in the summer of 1930 set up an agrarian political apparatus to recruit farmers into the National Socialist German Workers' Party. He saw three main roles for this apparatus: to exploit the unrest in the countryside as a weapon against the urban government; to win over the peasants as staunch Nazi supporters; and to gain a constituency of people who could be used as settlers to displace the Slavs in future conquests in the East. In short, his intent was to turn the countryside towards National Socialism.

'The unity of blood and soil must be restored', he proclaimed in 1930.²⁴ This infamous phrase denoted a quasi-mystical connection between 'blood' (the race or volk) and 'soil' (the land and the natural environment), specific to Germanic peoples and absent, for example, among Celts and Slavs. For the enthusiasts of *blut und boden*, the Jews were in particular a rootless, wandering people, incapable of a true relationship with the land. German blood, in other words,

²⁴ R. Walther Darre, *Um Blut und Boden: Reden und Aufsätze*, München, 1939, p. 28. The quote is from a 1930 speech entitled 'Blood and Soil as the Foundations of Life of the Nordic Race'.

engendered an exclusive claim to sacred German soil. In a language replete with the biological metaphors of organicism, Darre declared: 'The concept of Blood and Soil gives us the moral right to take back as much land in the East as is necessary to establish a harmony between the body of our volk and the geopolitical space.'²⁵

According to Darre, Germany was a failed giant. It had been culturally conquered by a series of alien ideas. The German peasantry, as a homogeneous racial group of Nordic antecedents, formed the cultural and racial core of the German nation. Though the peasants provided the source for population growth, they faced the threat of extinction because of the impact of lower population growth and urban life. The urban population had lost its racial and spiritual capacity to become peasants again. Thus, the peasantry and the core of the nation would die off. A rural, natural, and agricultural life was thus vital to build a state drawn from the agricultural realm. He proposed to form *Hegehofe* (hereditary holdings) in which 'Society would be divided into corporations, each forming a self-governing chamber, and only farmers from a *Hegehof* would have a vote . . . Foreclosure and the sale of farms would be forbidden. Younger sons would form the militia and the governing class, leading to the gradual formation of a peasant state within a state. Because food producers hold the whip hand over parasitical cities, and because of the cultural and racial vitality of the peasant world, it would conquer the town.'²⁶

A champion of 'biological-dynamic agriculture', Darre organized a campaign to persuade the top Nazi leaders to support organic farming. He served as the Third Reich's minister of food and agriculture from 1933 to 1942, and wrote several articles on ecological themes—some were on the dangers of erosion, some on the lessons of the Great Depression for agriculture. His works looked at the example of America and dwelt on the anti-erosion measures carried out under Roosevelt. Large farms, he argued, had been hit harder than small, self-sufficient farms; therefore it now might be more 'economic' to

²⁵ Bergmann, *Aggarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, p. 312.

²⁶ Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, p. 58.

use horse-drawn ploughs than combine harvesters.²⁷ As minister, Darre gave vital support to various ecologically oriented initiatives. Aside from providing a Green camouflage for the colonization of Eastern Europe, he worked to establish environmentally sensitive principles as the basis of the Third Reich's agricultural policy. Even in its most productive phases, these precepts remained emblematic of the Nazi doctrine. When the 'Battle for Production', a scheme to boost the productivity of the agricultural sector, was proclaimed at the second Reich Farmers' Congress in 1934, the first point in the programme read 'Keep the soil healthy!' Darre's most important innovation was the introduction on a large scale of organic farming methods, significantly labelled *Lebensgesetzliche Landbauweise*, or farming according to the laws of life.

On a broader plane, Manussos Marangudakis shows that the strongholds of ecological thought were Germany, the US, and England, with the Scandinavian countries close behind. The movement's central figures in Europe were Knut Hamsun, Ernst Haeckel, Henry Williamson, and less directly Martin Heidegger. All of them became associated with the radical Right. Hamsun, Heidegger, and Williamson were all members of Nazi parties in their respective countries and Haeckel's organization came to be associated with Nazi politics. They are all particularly interesting because they were not like the typical Nazi ecologists. Rather, they were the least political among all ecologists, yet eventually they too gravitated towards National Socialism. According to Marangudakis:

These four proto-ecologists shared a number of common themes. First, they were hostile to a technology independent of morality and community life, arguing that it contaminated social life: it destroyed the land and degraded people, diminishing their humanity. Second, they disliked modernity and its paraphernalia: urbanization, pollution, industrialization, capitalism, the undermining of traditional values, and the degradation of rural life. It all led to a loss of a sense of

²⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

belonging and, more importantly, principles. In a word, people no longer know how to live. But there is a solution: the return to nature. This may be achieved through intuition, metaphors, or reason. Nature 'knows', because human beings are part of it. The natural way will guarantee natural morality, social organization and economic well being.²⁸

Nature in National Socialism

When we National Socialists speak of a belief in God, we do not mean what naïve Christians and their clerical exploiters have in mind . . . The power of nature's law is what we call the omnipotent force or God . . . We National Socialists demand of ourselves that we live as naturally as possible, that is to say in accord with the laws of life. The more precisely we understand and observe the laws of nature and of life and the more we keep to them, the more we correspond to the will of this omnipotent force.—**Martin Bormann, Party Secretary, NSDAP**²⁹

The ecological ideas of Schreyer, Haeckel, and Darre exerted a powerful influence on many of the central figures in the NSDAP. Weimar culture was fairly awash in such theories, but the party and their ideology gave them a particular inflection. The National Socialist 'religion of nature', as one historian has described it, was a volatile mix of primeval Teutonic nature mysticism, pseudo-scientific ecology, irrationalist anti-humanism, and a mythology of racial salvation through a return to the land. Its predominant themes were natural order, organicist holism, and the denigration of humanity: 'Throughout the writings, not only of Hitler, but of most Nazi ideologues, one can discern a fundamental deprecation of humans *vis-à-vis* nature, and, as a logical corollary to this, an attack upon human efforts to master nature.'³⁰ The Führer was particularly fond of stressing the

²⁸ Manussos Marangudakis, 'Ecology as a Pseudo-Religion', *TEIOS*, no. 112, Summer 1998, pp. 107–24.

²⁹ Quoted in Boria Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust*, New York, Continuum, 2000, p. 106.

³⁰ Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature*, London, 1985, p. 40.

'helplessness of humankind in the face of nature's everlasting law'.³¹ Echoing Haeckel and the Monists, *Mein Kampf* announces: 'When people attempt to rebel against the iron logic of nature, they come into conflict with the very same principles to which they owe their existence as human beings. Their actions against nature must lead to their own downfall.'³²

The emphasis of National Socialism and the Nazi Party on holism and organicism also made their intention clear on humanity and nature. In 1934 the director of the Reich Agency for Nature Protection, Walter Schoenichen, established the following objectives for biology curricula: 'Very early, the youth must develop an understanding of the civic importance of the "organism", i.e. the co-ordination of all parts and organs for the benefit of the one and superior task of life.'³³ This kind of adaptation of biological concepts to social phenomena served to justify not only the totalitarian social order of the Third Reich but also its expansionist politics—the plan to conquer 'living space' in Eastern Europe for the German people. In the National Socialism worldview the idea of rootedness in nature, especially the search for a lost connection to nature, was most pronounced among the neo-pagans in the Nazi leadership, above all in Heinrich Himmler, Alfred Rosenberg, and of course Darre. Rosenberg says in his colossal *The Myth of the 20th Century*: 'Today we see the steady stream from the countryside to the city, deadly for the Volk. The cities swell ever larger, unnerving the Volk and destroying the threads which bind humanity to nature; they attract adventurers and profiteers of all colours, thereby fostering racial chaos.'³⁴

This was not just rhetoric; the top Nazi leadership associated with such practices. Hitler and Himmler were strict vegetarians and animal

³¹ 'Hitler', in Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1942*, Stuttgart, 1963, p. 151.

³² Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, München, 1935, p. 314.

³³ Quoted in Gert Groning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, 'Politics, Planning and the Protection of Nature: Political Abuse of Early Ecological Ideas in Germany, 1933–1945', *Planning Perspectives* 2, 1987, p. 129.

³⁴ Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München, 1938, p. 550. Rosenberg was, in the early years at least, the chief ideologist of the Nazi movement.

lovers, attracted to nature mysticism and homoeopathic cures, and staunchly opposed to vivisection and cruelty to animals. Himmler even established experimental organic farms for the SS, to grow herbs for medicinal purposes. And Hitler could sound like a veritable Green utopian, discussing authoritatively and in detail various renewable energy sources (including environmentally appropriate hydropower and the production of natural gas from sludge) as alternatives to coal, and declaring 'water, winds and tides' as the energy path of the future.³⁵ Even in the midst of war, Nazi leaders maintained their commitment to ecological ideals which were, for them, an essential element of racial rejuvenation. In December 1942 Himmler released a decree, 'On the Treatment of the Land in the Eastern Territories', referring to the newly annexed portions of Poland. It read in part: 'The peasant of our racial stock has always carefully endeavoured to increase the natural powers of the soil, plants and animals, and to preserve the balance of the whole of nature. For him, respect for divine creation is the measure of all culture. If, therefore, the new *Lebensraume* [living spaces] are to become a homeland for our settlers, the planned arrangement of the landscape to keep it close to nature is a decisive prerequisite. It is one of the bases for fortifying the German Volk.'³⁶ At the level of ideology, then, ecological themes played a vital role in the making of Nazis and National Socialism. The majority of the leading National Socialist ideologists were more or less inclined towards agrarian regeneration and anti-urbanism, and convinced of the need for a relative re-agrarianization: 'The change in the direction towards the "soil" had not been an electoral tactic. It was one of the basic ideological elements of National Socialism.'³⁷

There are questions about the extent to which the Nazis actually implemented environmental policies during the twelve-year Reich. On the one hand there was the agrarian and rural thrust, and on the other the rapid modernization of the Third Reich. Even these

³⁵ Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, pp. 139–40.

³⁶ Quoted in Heinz Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft und Agrarpolitik im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, Band II, München, 1958, p. 266.

³⁷ Norbert Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany*, Oxford, 1993, p. 56.

modernizing thrusts had a significant ecological component. The two men principally responsible for sustaining this environmentalist commitment in the midst of intensive industrialization were Reichsminister Fritz Todt and his aide, the high-level planner and engineer Alwin Seifert. Todt was 'one of the most influential National Socialists',³⁸ directly responsible for questions of technological and industrial policy. At his death in 1942 he headed three different cabinet-level ministries, in addition to an enormous quasi-official organization. According to his successor, Albert Speer, Todt 'loved nature' and 'repeatedly had serious run-ins with Bormann, protesting against his despoiling the landscape around Obersalzberg.'³⁹ The pre-eminent historian of German engineering describes this commitment: 'Todt demanded of the completed work of technology a harmony with nature and with the landscape, thereby fulfilling modern ecological principles of engineering as well as the "organological" principles of his own era along with their roots in *volkisch* ideology.'⁴⁰

The ecological aspects of this approach to construction went well beyond an emphasis on harmonious adaptation to the natural surroundings for aesthetic reasons. Todt also established strict criteria for respecting wetlands, forests, and ecologically sensitive areas. As in Darre, these environmentalist concerns were inseparably bound to a *volkisch*-nationalist outlook. Todt expressed this connection succinctly: 'The fulfilment of mere transportation purposes is not the final aim of German highway construction. The German highway must be an expression of its surrounding landscape and an expression of the German essence.'⁴¹

Todt's chief advisor and collaborator on environmental issues was his lieutenant Alwin Seifert, who bore the official title of Reich Advocate for the Landscape—his nickname within the party was

³⁸ Behemoth Franz Neumann, *The Structure and Practice of National Socialism 1933–1944*, New York, 1944, p. 378.

³⁹ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, New York, 1970, p. 261.

⁴⁰ Karl-Heinz Ludwig, *Technik und Ingenieure im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf, 1974, p. 337.

⁴¹ Quoted in Rolf Peter Sieferle, *Fortschrittsfeinde? Opposition gegen Technik und Industrie von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart*, München, 1984, p. 220.

'Mr Mother Earth'. He dreamed of a 'total conversion from technology to nature',⁴² and would often wax lyrical on the wonders of German nature and the tragedy of humankind's carelessness. In discharging his official duties Seifert stressed the importance of wilderness and energetically opposed monoculture, wetland drainage, and chemical agriculture. He criticized Darre as too moderate and called for an agricultural revolution towards a more peasant-like, natural, simple method of farming, independent of capital.⁴³

With the Third Reich's technological policies entrusted to figures such as these, even the massive Nazi industrial build-up took on a distinctively Green hue. The prominence of nature in the party's philosophical background helped ensure that more radical initiatives often received a sympathetic hearing in the highest offices of the Nazi state. In the mid-1930s Todt and Seifert vigorously pushed for an all-encompassing Reich Law for the Protection of Mother Earth 'in order to stem the steady loss of this irreplaceable basis of all life.'⁴⁴ The role of deputy leader Rudolf Hess in pushing and implementing environmental discourses and agendas is also noteworthy. He was, for two decades, Hitler's devoted personal deputy, 'Hitler's closest confidant',⁴⁵ the highest party leader and second in line to succeed the Führer; all legislation and every decree had to pass through his office before becoming law. A diehard nature lover, Hess insisted on a strictly biodynamic diet—not even Hitler's rigorous vegetarian standards were good enough for him—and believed only in efficacy of homoeopathic medicine. As a proponent of organic farming he was even more tenacious than Darre and pushed the latter to take more demonstrative steps in support of the *Lebensgesetzliche Landbauweise*.⁴⁶ With Hess's enthusiastic backing, as early as March 1933 a wide array of

⁴² Alwin Seifert, *Im Zeitalter des Lebendigen*, Dresden, 1941, p. 13.

⁴³ Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989, p. 198.

⁴⁴ Alwin Seifert, *Ein Leben für die Landschaft*, Düsseldorf, 1962, p. 90.

⁴⁵ William Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, New York, 1941, p. 19. Shirer also calls Hess Hitler's 'protégé' (p. 588) and 'the only man in the world he fully trusts' (p. 587), and substantiates Darre's and Todt's standing as well (p. 590).

⁴⁶ Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, p. 201.

environmentalist legislation was approved and implemented at national, regional, and local levels. These measures, which included reforestation programmes, bills protecting animal and plant species, and preservationist decrees blocking industrial development, undoubtedly 'ranked among the most progressive in the world at that time'.⁴⁷ Planning ordinances were designed for the protection of wildlife habitats and at the same time demanded respect for the sacredness of German forests. The Nazis also created the first nature preserves in Europe.

Along with Darre's efforts towards re-agrarianization and organic agriculture, as well as Todt and Seifert's attempts to institutionalize an environmentally sensitive land use planning and industrial policy, a major accomplishment of the Nazi ecologists was the *Reichsnaturschutzgesetz* of 1935. This unprecedented 'nature protection law' not only established guidelines for safeguarding flora, fauna, and 'natural monuments' across the Reich, it also restricted commercial access to the remaining tracts of wilderness. The comprehensive ordinance also 'required all national, state and local officials to consult with Naturschutz authorities in a timely manner before undertaking any measures that would produce fundamental alterations in the countryside.'⁴⁸ The German environmentalists were overjoyed at its passage. Walter Schoenichen declared it the 'definitive fulfilment of the *volkisch*-romantic longings',⁴⁹ and Hans Klose, Schoenichen's successor as head of the Reich Agency for Nature Protection, described Nazi environmental policy as the 'high point of nature protection' in Germany. Perhaps the greatest success of these measures was in facilitating the 'intellectual realignment of German *Naturschutz*' and the integration of mainstream environmentalism into the Nazi enterprise.⁵⁰

There have been varying interpretations of the relationship between Nature, National Socialism, and the Nazi Party. According to Albrecht

⁴⁷ Raymond Dominick, 'The Nazis and the Nature Conservationists', *The Historian*, vol. XLIX, no. 4, August 1987, p. 534.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 536.

⁴⁹ Jost Hermand, *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland: Zur Geschichte des Ökologischen Bewusstseins*, Frankfurt, 1991, p. 114.

⁵⁰ Dominick, 'The Nazis and the Nature Conservationists', p. 529.

Lorenz and Ludwig Trepl, the emphasis on 'blood and soil' in the tradition of nature and nationalism within the ideology of National Socialism was incompatible with the expansionist and colonial policies of Hitler and the Nazi Party. The 'blood and soil' tradition believed that each culture is the product of a unique natural space. Ideologies coming from abroad and not rooted in a particular landscape are anti-natural because they break the natural link between a culture/nation/people and the surrounding environment. Therefore, according to Lorenz and Trepl, 'The belief that cultures are bound to their places . . . permits just as little the penetration of foreigners into it as a holistic ecology permits the immigration of foreign animal and plant species into ecosystems . . . But such a model also does not permit emigration [from a particular natural space] . . . for this would signify a new invasion, i.e. the penetration of the foreign, "non-native" area [by a rooted species]. It would therefore signify nothing less than the "foreignization" of this new area.'⁵¹

There were attempts within the party to try and bridge this gap by offering other explanations. One biological and anthropological rationalization within the party and the ideology was to see Germans as a nomadic race whose nature was more inwardly determined than influenced by the landscape. Therefore, even as they united with the landscape, they could change it rather than being changed and influenced by it. The other explanation was based on the notion of a certain superiority of the German race. Even while it remained deeply rooted, it was argued, it was possible for it to expand its rootedness to other peoples and landscapes.

Hitler and the Nazi Party believed that all Slavs are inherently opposed to the environment—they even saw this as the reason for Polish landscapes including ugly and rough features. After the German army's conquest of Poland the Third Reich took up the task of changing and improving Polish landscapes with German features, plants, and designs, so that it could be given a German soul and body. An environmentalist and garden designer, H.F. Wiepking-Jurgensmann,

⁵¹ Albrecht Lorenz and Ludwig Trepl, 'Das Avocado Syndrome', *Politische Ökologie*, vol. 34, 1993, p. 18.

was appointed to work on the landscape of the newly annexed regions of Poland. He had also undertaken the greening and landscaping work around the new town of Auschwitz. In his words:

The landscape is always a form, an expression and a characteristic of the people living within it. It can be the gentle countenance of its soul and spirit, just as it can be the grimace of its soullessness or of human and spiritual depravity . . . It shows, with unembittered severity, whether a people is constructive and a part of the divine creative power or whether destructive forces must be ascribed to it. Therefore the Germans' landscapes differ in all ways from those of the Poles and the Russians—just as do the peoples themselves. The murders and cruelties of the Eastern races are engraved, razor-sharp, into the grimaces of their native landscapes.⁵²

This tradition of conservative, ultra-nationalist, exclusive environmentalism did not disappear with the demise of Hitler, the Nazi Party and National Socialism, and the end of the Second World War. Dormant in the immediate aftermath, it began reappearing after a few years through political parties and environmental groups. The emergence of one such political party, the German Community (*Deutsche Gemeinschaft*, or DG) in 1949, saw the articulation of nature and environmental issues in the pre-war tradition of nature and nationalism. The party stood, according to its statutes, for a free and strong democracy, and its goal was to restore the German Empire. 'Nation Europe' was one of the concepts it held dear. Although environmental issues were not high on its agenda, it did talk of an organic community, natural and national landscapes, and the interrelationship of nationalism and a strong nation on the one hand, and environmental protection on the other.

With the founding of the World Federation for the Protection of Life (WSL), there emerged a more open and articulate voice. Not only did the founders and intellectual leaders of WSL, like Gunther

⁵² Quoted in Gert Groning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, 'Politics, Planning, and the Protection of Nature: Political Abuse of Early Ecological Ideas in Germany', *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 127–48.

Schwab and Werner George Haverbeck, have Nazi pasts (they were associated with the ideology of National Socialism and Hitler's party), the environmental group had a clear agenda to connect environmental issues with questions of immigration and overpopulation in the Third World. Such experiences reveal that a conservative and right-wing understanding of environmental issues, and its use and abuse by conservative political organizations and environmental groups, endure over time. An understanding of these organizations and groups of the past, with their unique tenets and connections with the political situations of their time, provides a background for contemporary like-minded political groups and environmental organizations.

Contemporary Conservative Green Politics

The environmental problem is an immigration problem.—**Peter Gauweiler, former Bavarian environmental minister, Christian Social Union, 1991**

Although the ecological question is not a national question, the national question is a part of the ecological question, for our land and our people are sick . . . Yet while some see extreme dangers in the destruction of family, the decline of our people, and the loss of moral and ethical values, they overlook the environmental catastrophe; others indeed recognize this catastrophe but fail to see how this is a result of a disconnection from nature and its accompanying egocentrism, sexual perversion, advocacy of abortion, and decline into any number of addictions.—**Ursula Haverbeck-Wetzel, WSL, 1984**

Germany is an important example of the 'Greening' of conservative, right-wing parties, historically as well as in the present era, even though the German Green Party evolved out of the Left. One of the latter's most celebrated founder-members, Petra Kelly, actively promoted internationalism, resistance to nuclear weapons, the women's movement, equality within and between countries, and the idea that the unjust division of the riches of the earth could be resolved only through dramatic redistributive policies. Her death, together with that of her

partner Gert Bastien in 1992, apparently by suicide, robbed Germany of one of its most passionate politicians; and she and the revolving democratic leadership of the party gave it a firmly Left-radical orientation. The Greens were in coalition with the Social Democrats until 2005; Joschka Fischer, who became foreign minister, was consistently the most popular politician in Germany until he left parliament, and he had roots in the far Left.

So powerful has the influence of the Greens become in Germany that all mainstream parties have made a bid for the green vote; and naturally, the conservative Right has been active in promoting its version of greening Germany. But the imprecision of Green ideology, its very vagueness, means it can be captured by almost any party from time to time; and just as the far Right forms and melts away again (particularly under the withering effect of the mainstream media), so Green ideology plays hide-and-seek with Right and Left; labile, floating, protean, it has not yet hardened into clearly definable dogma.

The Right has in any case not been inactive in the bidding war on 'green issues'. Take, for example, The Republicans (*Die Republikaner*, REP). Founded in 1983 by former members of the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU), Franz Handlos and Ekkehard Voigt, the party thinks that the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the CSU are not sufficiently conservative. One of its key founders was Franz Schoenhuber, a one-time Bavarian television moderator and former Nazi officer, who published a book in 1981 boasting of his experiences in the Waffen-SS. The Republicans blame foreigners for the housing shortage, street crime, and pollution. Among other things, the party has proposed banning Islamic community centres from sponsoring political or cultural activities other than prayers, and advocated putting asylum-seekers in collection camps to minimize the native population's existing and growing antipathy towards foreign residents. Rejecting the idea of a multicultural society, the party proposes creating separate classes for foreign schoolchildren.

The REP garnered 7.5 per cent of the popular vote in the West Berlin legislative election in 1989. And in the 1989 European parliamentary elections, it was able to capture 7.1 per cent of the votes. In the 1980s the party had several seats in the European parliament as

well as in the parliament of the German state of Baden-Württemberg, where it had seats until 2001. Currently they attract between 1 and 2 per cent of the vote in Bavaria, and approximately 3.5 per cent in Baden-Württemberg, thus failing to reach the 5 per cent threshold necessary to win seats in their parliaments. In spite of its electoral setbacks, it has been remarked that 'The REP will likely remain the major radical right-wing party for the foreseeable future. It has carefully kept its distance from the overt violence practised by the apolitical gangs of mostly young roughnecks in East and West Germany. More important, the REP has been more skilful than other radical right-wing parties in attempting to portray itself as a legitimate party prepared to operate within the constitutional structure. Furthermore, its electoral strongholds in Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Berlin provide a more advantageous base from which to mount a campaign for national support.'⁵³

The REP calls itself the original and natural ecological party. It seriously engages with environmental issues, like chemicals in agriculture, the preservation of wildlife, energy conservation, and pollution-free transport, and suggests environmentally friendly solutions. For the party the environmental crisis is basically a crisis of national identity and, therefore, protection of the environment is closely linked with the protection of the nation and national identity: 'Socially responsible patriotism means preserving the homeland in its historical and natural diversity. We must become aware of the fact that with the destruction of our land, we lose an important part of our history and identity.'⁵⁴ The REP argues that national identity can be protected and environmental problems solved only if the country gets rid of immigrants: 'The conditions of life of the German people can only be assured if population density does not increase. Further immigration of foreigners into Germany must be stopped.'⁵⁵ The

⁵³ Karl H. Cerny, 'Foreword', in Hans-Joachim Veen, Norbert Lepszy, and Peter Mnich (eds), *The Republikaner Party in Germany: Right-Wing Menace or Protest Catchall?*, USA, Praeger Publishers, 1993, p. xi.

⁵⁴ The Republikaner (REP), *Berliner Programme*, 1995, www.rep-berlin.de.

⁵⁵ The Republikaner (REPs), *Grundsatzprogramm*, 1993, p. 35.

REP has also linked the abortion question to the protection of the environment, where the defence of life is shown as intrinsically linked to protection of the natural, human, and cultural being.

The German People's Union (*Deutsche Volksunion*, DVU), another right-wing conservative party, has also been active on environmental issues, though their official programmes and activities are not widely published. Gerhard Frey, a Munich publisher of two weekly neo-fascist newspapers, *Deutsche National-Zeitung* and *Deutsche Wochen-Zeitung*, founded the DVU in 1971. The DVU espouses many of the views held by the REP, but it goes one step further in tacitly supporting violence against asylum-seekers and foreign workers. In 2004, the DVU entered a non-competitive agreement with the far-right National Democratic Party (NPD) for the state elections in Brandenburg and Saxony. Both parties passed the 5 per cent threshold. The DVU won 6.1 per cent of the votes in Brandenburg and the NPD 9.2 per cent in Saxony. After this relatively successful election, the parties formed an electoral alliance for the 2005 federal elections. The joint NPD–DVU slate, which ran under the NPD's ballot line, won 1.6 per cent of the total votes nationally. Although it has never reached the 5 per cent minimum in federal elections that is generally necessary to enter the Bundestag, it has been gaining seats in several state parliaments. Germany's domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt fuer Verfassungsschutz*, BfV), announced in 1992 that the DVU was under surveillance to determine if the party met the legal definition of 'anti-democratic'—a classification that would permit the government to ban the party.

Under the rubric of a 'pure' Germany, the DVU believes that 'the love of home, a people, and a fatherland . . . are the best weapons against environmental pollution.'⁵⁶ The party also believes that the 'foreignization' of Germany and its humiliation at the hands of the United States and its allies are the causes of environmental problems. Advocating stronger laws against environmental polluters and tough prosecution, the party zeroes in on immigrants and advocates action against them. Besides its political forum, the party is also actively

⁵⁶ DVU, *Partei Programm*, 1993, www.dvu.net/programm.

involved in initiating civil society or citizens' forums like the Federation for the Protection of Life and Environment (*Schutzbund für Leben und Umwelt*) and the German Federation for the Protection of People and Culture (*Deutscher Schutzbund für Volk und Kultur*) – these also propagate the party's environmental philosophy.

Founded in 1964 as a successor to the German Reich Party (*Deutsche Reichspartei*, DRP), the National Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, NPD) calls itself the oldest and strongest right-wing party. Often labelled a neo-Nazi organization, the party has more than once faced banning under the country's laws. In 1966 it won significant successes in the state parliamentary elections in Bavaria (7.4 per cent of the votes), Rheinland-Palatinate (6.9 per cent), Schleswig-Holstein (5.8 per cent), Lower Saxony (7.0 per cent), Bremen (8.9 per cent), and Baden-Württemberg (9.8 per cent). In the 2005 federal elections it received 1.6 per cent of the vote nationally. It garnered the highest percentage of votes in the states of Saxony (4.9 per cent), Thuringia (3.7 per cent), Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (3.5 per cent), and Brandenburg (3.2 per cent). In most other states, the party won around 1 per cent of the total votes cast. In the 2006 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state election it received 7.3 per cent of the vote and thus achieved state representation there.

Party leader Udo Voigt says that the NPD's philosophy differs from both communism and social liberalism in that it acknowledges people as unequal products of their societies and environments, largely governed by what is called natural law. The NPD's platform says Germany is larger than the present-day Federal Republic and calls for revision of the post-war border concessions. A map of Germany on its website omits the borders that divide Germany from Austria and Poland.⁵⁷ The party has been working on environmental issues since its inception and among the causes it has tried to champion are organic food, pollution and emission controls, the banning of growth hormones and antibiotics in meat production, opposition to the use

⁵⁷ National demokratische Partei. *Parteiprogramm*, 1998. www.thulenet.com.

of chemical dyes and preservatives in food, and water conservation. However, their political worldview of preserving the putative ethnic homogeneity of Germany determines their understanding of ecological questions. The protection of natural diversity and ethnic manifestations of German society find ample expression in their environmental programmes: 'The protection of nature and the environment is an indispensable precondition for the preservation of human living space and the health of the people. The protection of peoples and of life must be made the leading principle of a new politics.'⁶ The party often draws attention to the destruction of traditional homogeneous ethnic communities and calls for sustainable development, a people's economy, and restoration of the natural conditions of life.

Working directly or indirectly with the right-wing and conservative political parties in Germany are well-known environmental organizations and think tanks. The Independent Ecologists of Germany (UOD) is one such environmental group, established in the early 1990s by Herbert Gruhl, a prominent author on environmental issues and one of the founders of the German Greens. Gruhl quit the Green Party in 1981 after accusing it of abandoning the cause of true ecology by moving to the political left. The UOD came out in support of the RLP at a time when the latter was very active against foreigners and immigrants, and when violence against them was on the rise. The group's journal *Ökologie* (Ecology) wrote an editorial in 1992 praising the RLP for its politics and condemning government action against the party as a sign of hysteria in the debate on foreigners and political asylum.⁷ Many prominent figures of the UOD have shared platforms with right-wing parties and even with neo-Nazi organizations, and contributed articles in journals and magazines published by far-right groups and parties. According to the founding programme of the UOD: 'Nature is not only the basis for our material existence; man, himself a part of nature, needs nature for his physical and spiritual health. A close connection to nature provides the basis for a love of one's original home. Only those in turn who respect the richness and

⁶ Nationaldemokratische Partei, *Partei-programm*, 1996.

⁷ *Ökologie* (Ecology), Journal of the UOD, 1991.

diversity of languages, ethnic groups, and cultures, and who in addition love their own homeland by seeking to protect it from centralism and multicultural colonization, can respect other peoples' love of their own home.'⁶⁰ By raising questions about economic growth, industry, and nuclear power, the UOD tries to critique the traditional left and right perspectives on environmental issues: 'The conspiracy of industrial society and its accompanying preoccupation with economic growth is the common coin of right and left politics. This progress means more factories, more streets, more luxury goods . . . and always fewer natural treasures, always dirtier conditions of life, always fewer undisturbed natural spaces. To this progress we say NO. Our "niche" in an intact nature is more important to us than any "niche" in an economy which endangers the future.'⁶¹ For the UOD a critique of the logic of growth 'begins with the economy and ends with overpopulation'.⁶² And to halt overpopulation and conserve the environment, the solution they propose is targeting immigrants.

The WSL is another old and prominent environmental organization in Germany, which shares a common platform with several right-wing and conservative parties in understanding and explaining environmental issues. Existing since 1958, the group was very active and visible in the anti-nuclear and other environmental movements and has been recognized for building up alliances and citizens' initiatives in the 1970s. The chairman of WSL, Werner Haverbeck, was the candidate of the German Greens in the 1979 European elections. The group's basic environmental philosophy comes from the concept of the protection of 'life' comprising plants, animals, human beings, and even the unborn, in their natural, original settings. Any external intervention in such natural settings destroys 'life'. The WSL categorizes the immigration problem as an environmental problem. As early as 1980 it had put together a position paper entitled 'The Foreigner Problem as an Ecological Problem'. The themes in this position paper—foreignization, national identity, and alienation from

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *Ökologie* (Ecology), Journal of the UOD, 1995, p. 11.

⁶² Ibid., p. 5.

nature and homeland—have been decisive for the development of right-wing ecological ideas.⁶³

However, amidst this, there is no denying the fact of the far stronger Red–Green alliance which has set the dominant tone for Green politics in Europe. In fact, Joschka Fischer, like Daniel Cohn-Bendit in France, was a member of the far left; both have had a decisive influence in the definition of what it means to be Green. There is a basic cleavage between those for whom the home country is threatened by immigration and overwhelmed by foreigners (this is a major strand in all European politics), and those for whom global justice and internationalism are important. The electoral successes of right-wing parties in Germany and elsewhere are undeniable. However, there is the continuing ideological tug-of-war between xenophobes and racists, and those who understand that the environment in Europe can no longer be insulated against the consequences of a globalization which knits the destinies of global rich and poor in a bond as tight as that between rich and poor within the countries of Europe in an earlier industrial period.

The Greening of the British National Party and Conservative Party

The British National Party (BNP) is the most prominent and highly organized of the far right in Britain. It too lays claim, in its Election Manifesto 2010, to being ‘the only true green party’. The BNP links immigration to the disappearance of ‘our green and pleasant land’. Britain has become one of the most densely populated countries in the world, and the BNP argues that, if immigration is left unchecked, ‘Britain will require a city the size of Birmingham to be built every five years and result in a total population of 90 million people by 2050.’ The party estimates that Britain can sustain a population of 30 million, less than half its present number. It is also the only political party to reject the idea of climate change, which is scarcely in sympathy

⁶³ Jonathan Olsen, *Nature and Nationalism: Right-Wing Ecology and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Germany*, London, Macmillan, 1990, pp. 18–19.

with the reverence for the earth claimed by the Green Right. In the election of 2010 the BNP received just over half a million votes, 1.9 per cent of the total. It won two seats in the European elections of 2009. It subsequently changed its emphasis, retreating from strident racism to vehement Islamophobia; and this mirrors the strategy of the far right in much of Europe. The BNP received more than twice as many votes as the Green Party in the same election, although Britain elected its first Green MP.

The far right in Britain has seen shifting fortunes. It flares up from time to time—in its earlier incarnation as the National Front, and later as the BNP—and gains seats sometimes in local elections. But it is inconsistent, and the mainstream media usually turns an intense scrutiny on its successes, portraying these as fundamentally ‘un-British’; and the party usually retreats again. It faces some competition from an even more virulent English Defence League, which has arisen as a specifically anti-Muslim movement over the past two or three years.

The far right in Europe is more concerned with racial than environmental protection, although the connection is usually made by citing the ‘pollution’ caused by the arrival of foreigners—not always non-white, as the resentment against Poles, Romanians, and other entrants from Eastern Europe into the countries of Western Europe shows. There is pervasive unease at the social consequences of a globalism which seems to many people in Europe to be a reversal of the ‘natural order’ of things. Europeans are often still nostalgic for the long imperial past in which it was they who did the moving into the lands and territories of others. The Green credentials of right-wing parties are usually subordinate to their opposition to immigration and overpopulation, and the fear of being ‘swamped’ (in a memorable phrase deployed by Mrs Thatcher in 1979) by non-white foreigners.

At the same time, an amorphous Green ideology still exists and is contested. Disputes between ‘deep Greens’ and others centre upon whether human kind as a species has a right to dominate all other creatures. The Animal Rights Movement has always been strong in Britain, and indeed was regarded as a terrorist organization by the authorities when it threatened individuals and laboratories dealing

with animal experimentation and genetic modification in the 1990s and 2000s. It is also true that the Green Movement in Britain has been supported by many upper classes, even aristocratic figures: Edward Goldsmith, founder of the *Ecologist*, was a deeply conservative man with a hatred of industrial society and a romantic attachment to the lifestyle of indigenous peoples. His nephew Zac Goldsmith is presently a Conservative MP. Other figures include Jonathan Porritt, former chair of the Ecology Party, forerunner of the Green Party, Green adviser to Tony Blair; he is a baronet; his father was governor-general of New Zealand; Lord Melchett formerly of Greenpeace and now of the Soil Association; and writer George Monbiot, who is descended of a family of refugees from the French Revolution.

The vagueness of Green ideology feeds into a widespread New Ageism, a quasi-mystical belief in harmony, holism, and horoscopes; a natural way of living, a return to simplicity, a life of the feelings, anti-rational and 'spontaneous'. It has generated a considerable range of activities from crystallography to aroma therapy, borrowings from Eastern spirituality, the power of positive vibrations, the elimination of negative feelings, and a general belief that 'modern life' is the source of all ills. Much of this is floating sentiment, not underpinned by ideology, but possibly capable of being captured by any leader or proponent who can turn it into dogma.

The case of the Tories—the Conservative Party in the UK—is a good example of how Conservatives have taken up environmental issues. The Conservatives were of course originally the party dedicated to conserving; they subsequently became economic liberals, defending the rights of unfettered capitalism. They are the longest surviving and most successful political party in the UK, a position they have achieved by being immensely adaptable, capable of absorbing reforms, adapting to changing sensibilities and new ideologies. The beginning of the Tories' involvement with environmentalism can be traced back to 1977, when the Conservative Ecology Group (CEG) was set up for printing and distributing short discussion papers on ecological issues among Conservative MPs and the press. None other than the Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher supported the group: 'I think it is important that Conservatives be identified with pressure

to improve the environment.⁶⁴ Eleven resolutions on the environment were passed in the 1979 annual conference of the Conservative Party, and more were added later, increasing the total to twenty-six in 1983. During the same period the Conservative administration passed two important pieces of legislations—the National Heritage Act, 1980, and the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981—to protect the rural landscapes and habitats, and to establish the National Heritage Memorial Fund. Michael Heseltine, secretary of state for the environment, said: ‘Even in our present difficult financial circumstances we have not ignored the need to protect and conserve our environment.’

None of this should come as a surprise, since the Conservative Party was traditionally the party of landed interests. It resisted the widening of the franchise with the Reform Bill of 1832, and affected to despise the ‘new money’ made from trade and industry (although the ‘old money’ of the old established aristocratic families had often been acquired in much less honourable ways). The idea of the ‘landed gentry’ also became a model for those who had made their money in industry, and they ensured that their children would live like ‘gentlemen’, often investing their money in parklands and a country house. Mimicry of the aristocracy and its attachment to the land has a long history in the annals of British conservatism.

The interest of the Conservative Party in environmentalism was given intellectual rigour by academic support. An issue of the journal *Politics Today* was devoted to the environment, in which the Conservative Research Department of the party dealt with policies, planning systems, pollution, and recreational provisions.⁶⁵ Moreover, various support groups and umbrella organizations linked to the party also harnessed their energies in the cause of the environment. In 1981 Stanley Johnson, a Conservative member of the European Parliament and former head of the European Commission’s Pollution Prevention Division, published *Caring for the Environment: A Policy for Conservatives*, issued jointly by the Conservative Political Centre and the

⁶⁴ Margaret Thatcher, *A Message of Support to the Conservative Ecology Group*, n.d., ca. 1978.

⁶⁵ *Politics Today*, January 1982.

European Democratic Group. Here, environmental concerns were linked with traditional Tory values: 'The sense that we hold land on trust for posterity and that we should not therefore permit random destruction and degradation is very much part of the Conservative spirit.'⁶⁶ The idea of a long-standing and deep-rooted affinity between traditional Tory philosophy and environmentalist concerns was further developed in other publications by Conservative leaders. Tony Paterson, a solicitor and parliamentary liaison officer for the Bow Group, explained: 'Green voters and conservative voters share an instinct for preserving what is good and fine and traditional around us. The nature conservationist is a natural Conservative.'⁶⁷

The Centre for Policy Studies, a think-tank of the Conservative Party, published a pamphlet, *Greening the Tories*, which emphasized the traditional conservative links to a national culture deeply attached to the past and which valued its physical surroundings.⁶⁸ Outlining the 'Green sensibility' of the English and their ingrained sensitivity to the cultural past and present, the pamphlet argued for an environmental policy that would 'correspond with conservative sentiments among ordinary people', and for the extension of private property ownership: 'The best way to combine human nature with environmental protection, to create proper and enduring links between people and their surroundings, and to protect our towns and countryside.'⁶⁹ In fact, throughout this period, well-known conservative economists and writers repeatedly used the language of environmentalism to justify private property and thereby create a ground for the economic policies of Thatcher, especially 'privatization'. Traditional arguments were heard: 'among the friends of conservation, the most committed are the personal owners. They have reason to be. Most heritage assets are personal assets and thus more valuable to the owner than anyone

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶⁷ T. Paterson, *Conservation and the Conservatives*, London, Bow Group, 1989, p. 3.

⁶⁸ A. Sullivan, *Greening the Tories: New Politics on the Environment*, London, Centre for Policy Studies, 1985, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 18–20.

else.⁷⁰ The exercise of personal ownership was relied on to mitigate economic and environmental problems. Conflict of interests surrounding a piece of land, for example, 'can be lessened or even resolved if there is a superior landlord with an interest in the preservation and improvement of the property as a whole.'⁷¹

Prime minister Margaret Thatcher's speech to the Royal Society on 27 September 1988 became an important reference point for the Conservative Party and its commitment to the environment. Expressing her own dedication to science and the environment, Thatcher dealt in detail with issues like greenhouse gases, climate change, the ozone hole, acid rain, and pollution: 'For generations, we have assumed that the efforts of mankind would leave the fundamental equilibrium of the world's systems and atmosphere stable. But it is possible that with all these enormous changes (population, agricultural, use of fossil fuels) concentrated into such a short period of time, we have unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of this planet itself.'⁷² For the Conservatives, the environment became an important means to further their political ends. A propaganda unit was created within the Department of Environment to coordinate government activities on environmental issues, alert ministers about conservation problems affecting their departments, and identify themes and ideas to be placed on the public agenda. For example, an environmental coordination unit was set up within the ministry of agriculture to achieve a balance between conservation and the promotion of enjoyment of the countryside on the one hand, and an efficient agricultural industry on the other.

This is not to deny that the present-day Conservative Party has become both more sophisticated and more 'liberal'. The Green agenda of the Tories is certainly in favour of greater privatization. But they also seem more concerned with global warming and carbon emissions,

⁷⁰ B. Bracewell-Milnes, *Land and Heritage: The Public Interest in Personal Ownership*, London, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1982, p. 80.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷² Margaret Thatcher Foundation, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches>.

and the rich opportunities offered by the prospect of 'green growth'—that is, private business in new green technologies, clean energy (including nuclear); so their line now is that a bonanza awaits those who cut greenhouse gases in order that we continue forever as we are now. The future is only an extrapolation of the present, except that it will be powered by green technologies. There is also no losing sight of the malign element within Conservative ideology, the idea that their countries are too crowded to accept immigrants. Underlying this is the suggestion of racial or social or religious pollution—a far cry from the relatively mild environmental policies of Thatcher. 'This crowded island' is the Tories' genteel semaphore to racists that it is anti-immigration.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) provides another interesting case of a nationalist party whose discourse and policy are concerned with the environment. Environmental imagery and issues pervade the SNP's discourse. The UK is viewed as a negligent landlord who deposits the dangerous by-products of British folly—in the form of nuclear weapons (Trident) and nuclear waste. Scotland is relatively unspoiled compared to the rest of the UK, at least partly because of its lower population density. Figures for nitrous oxide, sulphur dioxide, and carbon dioxide emissions are much lower here. The relative abundance of natural places makes the countryside 'a focus of popular culture'. It would indeed be surprising if a strong sense of place or nature did not emerge in the discourse of the SNP. Environmental concerns drive the nationalism of the SNP in interesting ways.⁷³

Another party to have gained from the merging of its nationalism with nature is Plaid Cymru (The Party of Wales), which has seen significant successes not only in Welsh elections but also in elections to the UK and European parliaments. Advocating Welsh independence and nationalism, they have created links with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, feminist organizations, and the Green Party. They have even reversed the party's commitment to economic growth in favour of sustainable development. The close ties which developed

⁷³ P. Hamilton, 'The Greening of Nationalism: Nationalising Nature in Europe', *Environmental Politics*, vol. 16, February 2007, pp. 27–48.

between the Welsh Green Party and Plaid Cymru since the early 1990s are said to be based on 'sustainability' and to 'free themselves of Anglo-centricity'. According to a party leader, there is a natural compatibility, although the two come from distinct starting points: environmental sustainability and the recognition that we must live within our limits for the Welsh Green Party, but cultural distinctiveness and the need for political structures that can enable the development of Welsh nationhood for Plaid Cymru.⁷⁴

However, it is also true that the nationalistic currents articulated through environmental concerns in both Scotland and Wales have to be interpreted in the light of British industrialization, which has left a long and bitter legacy. The destruction of the South Wales coalfields in a mere three generations, the five coalfields of Scotland as well as an older story of the highland clearances, the removal of people for the sake of more profitable sheep, the destruction of the old clan system and other such events have led parties and governments to establish their identities in the environmental arena.

Across Europe: Environmental Ideas in Right-Wing Politics

If we want to send the Arabs and Africans and Asians back to where they came from, it is not because we hate them, it is because they pollute our national identity.—**Bruno Megret, the French National Front, 1997**

The far right in Europe is currently on a high. Their vote share exceeds 10 per cent in eleven countries: Austria 12.75; Belgium 10.95; Bulgaria 12; Denmark 14.8; France 10; Hungary 14.8; Italy 10.2; Lithuania 12.2; Norway 22.9; Netherlands 17; and Switzerland 29. There are three basic strands to the present face of the European far right: (1) Old neo-fascists, whose enemy remain Jews and Bolsheviks. These are the Republikar in Germany, the Spanish Falangists, the Italian

⁷⁴ Quoted in Peter Lynch, 'From Red to Green: The Political Strategy of Plaid Cymru in the 1980s and 1990s', *Regional and Federal Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1995, pp. 197–210.

Social Movement, and other such groups, who have not gained an equal significance. (2) The anti-establishment parties, which since 1990s have been trying to break into the mainstream; and (3) The anti-Islamic, anti-immigration far right who have a growing popular base. Although they may have a fierce attachment to their country, this is expressed most vehemently not so much as a way of protecting the environment as in xenophobic rejections of the 'other'. Across Europe, far-right-wing political parties, groups, and organizations are also taking up environmental issues as one of their central themes to build their case against the other. For example, in France the National Front (NF) is one of the vocal champions of environmental causes. It is a far-right political party founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, and claims to have 75,000 members. In the 2002 French presidential elections Le Pen finished a distant second to Jacques Chirac. From 2002 to 2006 the NF established itself as the third largest political party in France. Le Pen has been condemned as an apologist for war crimes and crimes against humanity, and for trivializing the Holocaust. The NF argues for a return to traditional values; making access to abortion more difficult or illegal; giving an income to mothers who do not go out to work; promoting local, traditional culture; reinstatement of the death penalty; and an end to non-European immigration, particularly Muslim immigration from North Africa, West Africa, and the Middle East. In a pamphlet delivered to all French electors in the 1995 presidential election, Le Pen proposed 'sending back . . . three million non-Europeans' by 'humane and dignified means'.

Speaking for the protection of life, nature, environment, cultural heritage and language, and taking an anti-nuclear stance, the NF considers ecological issues the natural territory of a conservative, right-wing party. Le Pen believes that only a party that truly loves its homeland can be a party of ecology, for only such a party recognizes that preserving deep love of one's native soil, necessary for environmental consciousness, is dependent on keeping national identity pure and inviolate.⁷⁵ Another prominent leader, and second-in-command of

⁷⁵ Jonathan Marcus, *The National Front and French Politics*, New York, New York University Press, 1995, p. 111.

the NF till 1998, believed that protecting nature means preserving the non-human world as well as protecting the ethnic group, nation, and culture: 'Why fight for the preservation of animal species while accepting the disappearance of human races through widespread inbreeding?'⁷⁶

When promoting environmental issues, even the major Green parties in France sometimes echo the extreme conservative tendencies of right-wing parties like the NF. Les Verts (The Greens) is one such party that has officially been in existence since 1984 and is part of the European Green Party. It had actually emerged earlier, in 1982, from the merger of the Ecologist Party with the Ecologist Confederation. Under the ideological guidance of Antoine Waechter, in 1986 the party signalled a break with the traditional divide in French politics, declaring that environmental politics could not be 'married' to either the left or the right, which gave rise to its famous slogan *ni droite, ni gauche* (neither right, nor left). Waechter ran in the 1988 presidential elections and won 3.8 per cent of the votes in the first round. But the major breakthrough came the following year when the Greens polled 10.6 per cent of the votes in the European parliamentary elections. Despite drastic ups and downs in its electoral fortunes and several ideological shifts, the party today has many representatives in regional and local assemblies and is part of some regional governments, such as the capital region or the Nord-Pas de Calais. It also had members in the parliament and some senators in the 1990s. Les Verts entered into an electoral alliance with the NF in the regions of le Var and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur on the common understanding of protecting French identity from the negative influence of foreigners. The 1986 programme of Les Verts stated:

There is some incoherence on the part of ecologists in demanding the safeguarding and promotion of regional cultures, without taking into consideration the strong presence of foreign minorities . . . It would be frustrating to visit Brittany if at every step one had to bump into a Swiss or a Croatian, if one could no longer find, even interspersed

⁷⁶ Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 105.

among other elements, a people (*ein Volk*) in intense symbiosis with the land (*ein Land*) it inhabits and to which it is attached, the linguistic, cultural, and architectural heritage of which it can bring to life.⁷⁷

Waechter quit the party in 1994 and formed a new organization, the Independent Ecological Movement, which has been collaborating with other established right-wing parties.

The Dutch Centre Democrats (CD), founded in 1984, was based on a strong antipathy for a multicultural society and immigration. Its programme was called, 'East, West, Home Best' (*Oost West Thuis Best*), a Dutch proverb. Its slogan in the campaign against immigration was 'Full is Full' (*Vol is Vol*). CD stood for more direct democracy, environmental conservation, the death penalty, and mandatory AIDS tests. Though it had come out of a split from a far-right centre party, it managed to improve its image by aligning with environmental movements at the grassroots. In 1989 the CD won 1 seat in parliament, and in the municipal elections the next year it won 11 seats. It also won seats in Amsterdam and Hague. In several neighbourhoods of Amsterdam, the party won more than 25 per cent of the votes.

The Vlaams Blok (VB), a Belgian right-wing political party that advocated aggressive anti-immigration and Flemish nationalism, also called for a series of environmental programmes such as the conservation of nature parks, local management of natural resources, decentralization of power, and strict legislation on pollution, including the 'polluter pays' principle. After a court ruling in April 2004 that some of the party's organizations had breached the 1981 law on racism and xenophobia, it was rechristened Vlaams Belang. Its strong track record in the Flemish and Belgian parliamentary elections has been a result of campaigns whose central themes have been immigration; and law-and-order and environment, combined with a desire for Flemish autonomy.⁷⁸

The Swiss Democrats (SD) comprises a right-wing political party in Switzerland. In the 2003 federal elections the party won 1 per cent

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.110.

⁷⁸ Vlaams Blok, www.vlaams-blok.be/programma.html.

of the popular vote and 1 out of 200 seats. This seat was lost in the 2007 elections, in which the party's share fell to 0.5 per cent of the popular vote. After this major electoral loss, the party congress decided not to disband but continue competing in elections, striving to return to parliament. The party advocates Switzerland's rapid withdrawal from all international treaties and organizations, and a controlled decrease in immigration. It also supports traditional family and community values and environmental policies. It has supported almost every Green initiative since the beginning of the year 2000. It works on issues of pollution, conservation, urban environment and sustainable development, with a holistic conception of ecology: 'The protection of human beings and the environment is an inseparable unity.'⁷⁹



The majority of European Green movements and Green political parties in Europe are overwhelmingly anti-racist, internationalist, redistributive, and in favour of their idea of social justice. In general, in Europe Greens are seen as more left than right. There were calls of convergence between Red and Green, for socialists and environmentalists to find common ground. Radical philosophers like Andre Gorz, a known theorist in the new left movement who has written 'Ecology as Politics', have conducted a fundamental inquiry into the nature of wealth and proposed the existence of a 'Lifeworld' where 'the economic' should rightly occupy a small part.⁸⁰ And Wolfgang Sachs, the German environmental thinker, says:

Socialism is based on an enormous insight. Technical progress provides us with a floor under which nobody has to fall. Scarcity can be removed. The hope of socialism is that all people can lead a dignified life. Environmentalism adds another dimension. It says there is not just a lower limit; there is also an upper limit. There is a threshold beyond which there can be no more justice or democracy because

⁷⁹ Swiss Democrats, www.schweizer-demokraten.ch.

⁸⁰ Andre Gorz, *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology*, London, Verso, 1994.

progress, or wealth creation, takes a form in which not everybody can participate. There is a ceiling. If you go beyond it, wealth creation becomes oligarchic in nature.⁸¹

But, as this chapter suggests, environmental issues are becoming a battleground on which diverse groups, ranging from far-right to neo-conservatives, from traditional old parties to new political initiatives, and from party-affiliated support groups to independent think-tanks, are trying to harness their energies. They have divergent and sometimes opposite views on economic development, growth, industry, technology, and the market, and their environmental programmes and activities vary. There are distinctions between right and far right, since the environmentalism of Thatcher and Cameron is a far cry from that of the British National Party, let alone Nazi Germany. At the same time, a study of them provides us with insights into certain ecological chauvinisms.

According to this outlook, distinctive geographic and environmental characteristics combined organically with particular landscapes to shape and develop the paths of different cultures. Human beings, like other species, are embedded in nature and can live in peaceful coexistence. Environmentalism means the protection of the natural diversity of the non-human world and the natural diversity of human cultures. This latter should be preserved by the exclusion of foreigners, immigrants, and aliens, just as the former should be protected by excluding non-native and foreign species. In this way, both the non-human and the human world can, they believe, be kept free of pollution. As environmental and cultural pollution go together, so do the ways to address both—solutions to the environmental crisis are to be found in national cultural renewal. Moreover, environmentalism also means for these forces the protection of humans, animals, species, and a culture, located in a specific geography and landscape, from the forces of globalization, alienation, and homogenization.

However, it is also true that several right-wing and conservative groups in Europe are quite hostile to environmental concerns.

⁸¹ David Ransom, 'Red and Green: Eco-socialism Comes of Age', *The New Internationalist*, no. 307, November 1998, p. 9.

Neo-liberal ideas—the policy of *laissez-faire* in economy and trade, the supremacy of market institutions, the weakening of environmental laws—have been a hallmark of the conservatives who have also been opposing environmental groups and their concerns as anti-capitalist or anti-development. In most Western countries conservatives have accused environmentalists of a misuse of science, of propagating an apocalyptic mentality, and of being enemies of the central institutions of modern civil society.⁸² This does not, however, detract from the fact that a Green concern for the integrity of the common environment, human as well as ecological, is mostly in harmony with the outlook of traditional conservatism of the British and European varieties. Many of the central conceptions of traditional conservatism have a natural congruence with Green concerns: the Burkean idea of the social contract, not as an agreement among anonymous, ephemeral individuals, but as a compact between the generations of the living, the dead and those yet unborn; Tory scepticism about progress, and awareness of its ironies and illusions; conservative resistance to untried novelty and large-scale social experiments; and perhaps, most especially, the traditional conservative tenet that the individual can flourish only in the context of forms of common life.⁸³

⁸² John Gray, *Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government and the Common Environment*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 124.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Historical Trajectories

Nature for Nationalism

Ecological degradation and pressure on renewable resources and animal life, increasing pollution, and the adverse impact of rapid industrialization have prompted environmental initiatives, books, and reports.¹ Global warming, ozone depletion, and the emission of sulphur and nitrogen oxides that cause acid rain, often uncontained within national boundaries, have led to the realization that the futures of North and South are inextricably linked.² Newspapers regularly narrate environmental horror stories, with editorials demanding better management of natural resources. Statements from the government on the need to preserve the environment are now commonplace; state-sponsored environmental programmes have increased; there are new laws for control of air and water pollution and the conservation of forests; and there is some praise for what India

¹ Anil Agarwal *et al.* (eds), *The State of India's Environment, 1982: A Citizens' Report*, New Delhi, CSE, 1982, and *The State of India's Environment, 1984–85: The Second Citizens' Report*, New Delhi, CSE, 1985; Anil Agarwal, Darryl D'Monte, Ujwala Samarth (eds), *The Fight for Survival: People's Action for Environment*, New Delhi, CSE, 1987; David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha, 'Introduction: Themes and Issues in the Environmental History of South Asia', in David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha (eds), *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 17–18.

² Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 22–5.

has done to save tigers. Overall, it appears that 'environment is an idea whose time has come'.³

Environmental issues began to become prominent in India from the 1970s and found expression in movements in the 1980s. The origins of such environmentalism are not, of course, so recent. Environmentalists often explain particular concerns beyond their specificities, within a wider time and policy framework. Articulated in varied forms, environmentalism as an ideology propounds a comprehensive vision of politics and society based on its understanding of the causes of environmental problems. This vision encompasses a critique of the modern path of development and the present exploitative relationship between human beings and nature—which took shape especially in the colonial and post-colonial eras. A deep resentment against the trajectory of modernity and a fundamental unease with the environmental consequences of modernization's intellectual heritage is often expressed. Examining some of the major lines of developmental and environmental arguments in India before and after Independence, and paying attention to a continuing but also changing use of nature for nationalism, are both necessary for an understanding of the contemporary convergence of Green and Saffron. Although the tradition of 'nature for nationalism' was not the only form of environmental reasoning earlier, it has been one of the most visible strands, and its arguments have had a powerful resonance. We need therefore to explore the ideological continuities and discontinuities that exist between this earlier tradition and its recent editions, and to mark out the major themes and features of contemporary conservative environmentalism.

Especially important in the recent convergence of Green and Saffron is environmentalism's critique of development-induced modernization based on the Western model. One branch of environmentalists, as we have seen, posits a particular understanding of nation and national identity. Their conception of nature as unique, given, natural, spontaneous, and pure is central to their vision, for, according to them, the destructive consequences of development are caused by a false separation of the natural and social worlds. They maintain that humans

³ Anil Agarwal, 'Politics of Environment—II', in Agarwal *et al.* (eds), *State of India's Environment, 1984–85*, p. 362.

are an integral part of nature. The nation, its people, and culture are as distinctive and unique as the natural landscapes in which they are supposedly rooted. By the beginning of the 1970s the negative effects of economic and industrial policies on the Indian environment had become clear, and a model for understanding the roots of this destruction of nature was being sought. Environmentalism seeped into political discourse at this time, when India's polity and society were in the first throes of a transition to full industrialization, giving rise to questions of how to understand Indian identity. Varieties of environmentalism became manifest in the discourse of Hindu nationalists. Imprints of these were evident in the movement against the Tehri dam, in the activism of Sunderlal Bahuguna and Anna Hazare, and in writings by authors such as Gadgil, Banwari, and Shiva. Collectively, this environmentalism saw environmental degradation essentially as a result of the imposition of a Western, colonial civilization over a rooted, indigenous, Indian culture. In this form of environmental critique the conservation of nature was seen as dependent on the conservation of a past, pure, ideal nation, and its ancient culture and tradition—which, it was argued, was always in accord with the laws of nature. Ideas of nation and nature intermesh so completely in this view that defending the environment from pollution is virtually the same as defending the nation, and vice versa.

In examining the main features of 'nature for nationalism' or the 'nature and culture' tradition on the one hand, and the ideological contours of Hindu nationalist environmental concerns on the other, the intention is not to draw a straight or unbroken line between environmentalism and Hindu nationalism. Historical realities are always more complex. There are many political, historical, and structural reasons at work in the rise of Hindu nationalists—everything cannot and should not be read back into environmental history. But neither does Hindu authoritarian ideology appear out of the blue; political explanations for the rise to prominence of Hindu nationalism do not suffice by themselves. The phenomenon of Hindutva's ascent must also be understood in relation to the ideological arsenal it draws from the language, discourse, and universes of meaning in Indian political culture.

The mapping and remapping of land, water, river, mountains,

frontiers, heroes, and forefathers has been a strategy by which nationalists of all kinds—literary, philosophical, or militant—have imagined, narrated, and activated their nations, even if not always consciously. In colonial India, environmental imagery was said to be an important means of developing a national as well as regional or religious consciousness, and in contesting British cultural and political dominance.⁴ Such use of nature for nationalism has been traced back to Montesquieu, who theorized nation-building in specific physical environments, and to Rousseau's idea that 'the mountains, seas and rivers form the frontiers for the nations living in Europe, and it is clear that nature itself has determined the number and greatness of nations.'⁵ It has also been argued that new nations, for instance Canada and South Africa, which had not existed prior to the encounter with the new physical environments that helped forge them, showed a great sensitivity to their natural environment. The process of nation-building within a certain landscape was telescoped for settlers into a lifetime's experience.⁶

The British colonial regime in India, as against settler regimes, focused its attention on exploitation of the colonized landscape's natural resources. The pattern of land use within India was organized to maximize revenue-yield to the British crown, and the commodities it could produce to feed the British economy. Peasants in some regions were forced to cultivate cash crops such as cotton, jute, and indigo to service British industries. The diversity of trees in other regions was curtailed to species that would better cater to the building of British ships and laying of railway lines. In every possible way, the British wanted to shape India as a supplier of cheap raw materials and as a market for its higher-priced manufactured goods.⁷

⁴ David Arnold, *Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p. 185.

⁵ N. Davies, *God's Playground I*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 523–5.

⁶ Hedva Ben-Israel, 'Hallowed Land in the Theory and Practice of Modern Nationalism', in Benjamin Z. Kedar and R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (eds), *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, New York, New York University Press, 1998, pp. 278–94.

⁷ Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use*

Popular resistance to British interventions in the use and ownership of natural resources, such as tribal and peasant movements, boycott and swadeshi movements, salt satyagrahas and labour rebellions,⁸ are by no means the complete story. It has been remarked that there 'were also forms of ideological resistance, most evident among the Indian middle class, to colonial attempts to appropriate the environment exclusively to a British agenda of "civilization" and "progress". Indians sought, at various levels, to contest these colonial "readings" of their environment, to reject the negative images and associations that western "topicality" imposed upon them, and to assert their own identity through environmentally related symbols and values.'⁹ Certain images and symbols, especially drawn from the environment, were often a powerful rallying point for an emerging sense of national identity. In this sense, Gandhi's deployment of the salt tax as the central issue in his civil disobedience campaign of 1930 was emblematic of a wider determination to contest British environmental control and exploit its symbolic as well as practical significance. Salt was somewhat exceptional in its pan-Indian significance amidst the enormous ecological diversity of the country. The landscapes, flora, and fauna of Bengal, even the food, were very different from those of Gandhi's Gujarat in the west or Tamilnadu in the extreme south. Moreover, many natural symbols in India carried a specific religious connotation and so might not be readily acceptable to followers of other faiths. However, salt brought them all together.

The notion of territoriality, a combination of many environmental elements such as the boundaries of land, sea, and river, became an important factor in this nationalism. The territorial imperative was strong and blinding, commanding allegiance, and eliciting patriotism as well as xenophobia. In relation to recurrent rebellions in the hills near the Godavari river (the erstwhile Agency Areas, now in Andhra Pradesh) from 1839 to 1924, a historian notes that 'Territoriality and

and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 9–12.

⁸ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947*, Delhi, Macmillan India, 1983.

⁹ Arnold, *Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, p. 185.

xenophobia are to be found in many, if not most, peasant struggles in India, but they are particularly acute in the risings and rebellions of the hillmen of India, where such identities and aversions are reinforced by the cohesiveness of communities that have remained relatively isolated, the limited social differentiation they often exhibit, and above all by that exceptionally sharp divide between those who live in the hills and those who inhabit the plains.¹⁰ Nationalist forces tried similarly to deploy assumptions about forest society in pre-colonial India to counter the colonial regime. A picture was forged of a past in which people had long lived in unchanging egalitarianism and harmony with nature until the British grabbed their land and turned them into an exploited and subaltern class. In this narration indigenes were seen as rooted in an ancient wisdom far superior to that of the West: the civilization of India conserved forests while the civilization of the West destroyed them.¹¹

The colonial period thus witnessed a contemplation of the profound economic significance of natural resources. Nature was not 'a mere sickly sentimentalism or the vapourings of an overheated imagination', it was in fact synonymous with 'that robust and practical patriotism which was broad-based upon a reasoned appreciation and analysis of the manifold contributions made to our economic life and progress.'¹² To arouse the nation, the country was seen as a bountiful woman worthy of worship, and nationalists set out to record and propagate this abundance—her gifts and treasures of agricultural wealth, the richness of her botanical and zoological sources, her vegetable and animal products, her splendid livestock, her mineral wealth, the atmospheric wealth she brought, the congenial character of her climates and seasons, her very days and nights, her human wealth

¹⁰ David Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudum-Rampa Risings 1839–1924', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 141–2.

¹¹ David Hardiman, 'Power in the Forest: The Dangs, 1820–1940', in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds), *Subaltern Studies VIII*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 89–94.

¹² Radha Kumud Mookerji, *Nationalism in Hindu Culture*, Delhi, S. Chand & Co., 1957, pp. 27–8.

and heroic sons. Questions of national identity thus became even more entangled with nature devotion, which has been referred to as 'ecological nationalism'. Nature devotion expressed itself in the form of national pride in order to become part of processes legitimizing and consolidating the nation.¹³

The economist Sukhamoy Chakravarty says that in the early 1950s, when the planning process was initiated in India, there was a general consensus on a 'commodity-centred' approach. In essence this entailed robbing the mass of India's subsistence agriculturists of their means of production and of all guarantees afforded by the old feudal arrangements. In this development model, modern enterprise and industrialization as a project specifically of the capitalist class and the state had to be expressed, however, as the general project of the nation, and this was done in part by subsuming it within the body of a single plan for the nation, and by purging those elements that appeared as 'constraints' on the particular will of the modern sector.¹⁴ When analysing development planning in the post-colonial Indian state, Partha Chatterjee explains that whereas political strategy of building up a mass movement against colonial rule had required the Congress to espouse Gandhi's idea of machinery, commercialization, and centralized state power as the curses of modern civilization thrust upon the Indian people by European colonialism, the new national state had to radically reverse this view of the national good. Planning emerged as a crucial institutional modality by which the state would determine the material allocation of productive resources within the new nation: 'The reification of the "nation" in the body of the state becomes the means for constructing this hegemonic structure, and the extent of

¹³ Gunnel Cederlöf and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds), *Ecological Nationalisms: Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2005, pp. 1–40. The editors argue that in claiming nationhood and celebrating the nation, nature is appropriated in order to manifest the legitimacy of claims. However, it is fruitful to explore different ways in which ecological nationalism is expressed. There is thus a distinction between metropolitan-secular nationalism and an indigenist regionalist appropriation of nature.

¹⁴ Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning: The Indian Experience*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, pp. 2–42.

control over the new state apparatus becomes a precondition for further capitalist development. It is by means of an interventionist state, directly entering the domain of production as mobilizer and manager of investable "national" resources that the foundations are laid for industrialization and the expansion of capital.¹⁵ Gadgil and Guha also describe the model of development following Independence wherein nature and natural resources were used like an offering for worship by the nation:

State power now passed into the hands of the landowner warrior and priestly castes of the countryside and the priestly and trader castes of the cities. This alliance was committed to the ideal of halting the drain of India's resources abroad. At the same time it was eager to refashion the pattern of resource use to serve its own interests. There were obvious limitations to what could be achieved in the framework of a low-input economy, one no longer capable of yielding much of a surplus. The solution obviously lay in industrialization; in tapping the energy of coal and petroleum, of hydroelectric power, in producing steel and cement and using the resources so generated to promote manufacture.¹⁶

In the specific context of forests—one of the major ecological regimes—Gadgil and Guha describe how in the late 1950s foresters advocated giving up selective felling in stands of natural forest, replacing this with an aggressive plantation forestry which called for the large-scale clear-felling of natural forests to create plantations of fast-growing exotics such as eucalyptus and tropical pine.

The prominent environmental writer and researcher Darryl D'Monte sees in this period the rebirth of a country involving the building of dams and massive projects. He remembers Nehru's words at the opening of the Nangal canal—part of the massive Bhakra multi-purpose project in Punjab in 1954—describing mammoth development projects as 'the temples of today'.¹⁷ And then, 'Visiting the

¹⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 200–19.

¹⁶ Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity*, p. 13.

¹⁷ In the first flush of independence, Nehru made a bold and unequivocal assertion in 1954 in support of harnessing natural resources for modernization

gigantic Bhakra dam a few years later as a teenager and marvelling at the vast ocean-like reservoir behind the concrete barrage; as my face tingled with the fine mist rising from the waters cascading through the sluices, I was infused with an emotional upsurge, the feeling that I was witnessing the rebirth of a country that had long slumbered in the throes of its colonial past.¹⁸

In relation to tribal areas and tribal communities, the independent Indian state once again justified its appropriation of rights over natural resources in the name of the national interest. The aim of this policy, according to the Report of the National Council of Applied Economic Research, was to integrate tribal communities within the body politic of the nation: 'This is sought to be achieved through raising the standard of living in the tribal areas to that in the rural areas of the country. Since the tribal areas are exceptionally backward and primitive, welfare of the people living therein is sought to be achieved through some measures of protection during the next 20 years.'¹⁹ Towards this highly-acclaimed end:

Top priority has been given to a programme of rapid industrialization and extension of means of communication to the most interior regions in the state. Our firm view is that the development of land and agriculture alone will not be adequate for the rehabilitation of the tribal communities. Agricultural land is insufficient and cannot serve the needs of even half the tribal population of the State. Fortunately, the tribal areas of the State are rich in industrial and power potential. There is no reason why in the wider interest of the nation and in the

and industrialization. He said, while opening the Nangal canal: 'When I walked around the site, I thought that these days, the biggest temple and mosque and gurudwara is the place where man works for the good of mankind. Which place can be greater than Bhakra Nangal, where thousands of men have worked or shed their blood and sweat and laid down their lives as well? Where can be a holier place than this; which can we regard as higher?' This statement has been mythologized and is much quoted in diverse contexts.

¹⁸ Darryl D'Monte, *Temples or Tombs? Industry versus Environment: Three Controversies*, New Delhi, CSE, 1985, p. 1.

¹⁹ NCAER (National Council of Applied Economic Research), *Socio-Economic Conditions of Primitive Tribes in Madhya Pradesh*, New Delhi, NCAER, 1963, p. vi.

long-term interest of the tribals themselves, industries should not be developed and localized in tribal areas.²⁰

Every large project was presented as beneficial for the masses and therefore in the national interest, even though it almost always required the poor to surrender land and livelihood. The hegemonic effort emanated from the top. Suresh Sharma describes Nehru reassuring those displaced by the Rihand dam in Singrauli in 1961: 'People felt that their suffering would not be in vain. Their instinctive sense of nobility was stirred when Nehru spoke of the Nation and Development. They believed in his promise of a future of plenty to be shared by all. And they half accepted the trauma of displacement believing in the promise of irrigated fields and plentiful harvests. So often have the survivors of Rihand told us that they accepted their sufferings as sacrifice for the sake of the nation.'²¹

The environmental historian Mahesh Rangarajan is another illustrious academic who shows elements of nature being used for varied and different phases of nationalism and nation-building. Tracing India's wildlife history, he points out that preserving the nation's wildlife was integral to the nationalist project to save one of its emblems, the Indian tiger. Earlier, the lion had been the subject of such symbolism. The animal was part of a national emblem which had taken shape as the Ashoka pillar with its three lions. It then became 'the national animal' of India in 1952. Its qualities were praised in terms that played on regional pride. Thus, 'the coming of Independence eventually ended the era of huge shoots and trophy hunts, with

²⁰ Ibid. And for an analysis on the rapid exploitation of natural resources in tribal areas because of these policies, see Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*, pp. 49–84.

²¹ Suresh Sharma, 'The Vanquished Tribal World of Shifting Cultivation', in A. Bhalla and P.J. Bumke (eds), *Images of Rural India in the 20th Century*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1992, p. 78. Also see Dunu Roy, 'Politics of Environment', in Agarwal *et al.* (eds), *The State of India's Environment, 1984–85*. Roy, a well-known environmental activist and writer, argues that the response of the state towards environmental issues and movements has been to introduce more legislation, which further centralizes powers in the 'national interest'.

the lion becoming an early emblem of the new nation's bid to break with imperial legacies.²²

In brief, it is evident that every time some element of nature or some resource of the landscape needed either to be saved or exploited for specific ends that had been identified as necessary by private and state capitalism, this element or resource was declared 'national'.

Gandhian Thought: An Environmental Grounding

Mahatma Gandhi's perceptions of environment and development are said to be the single-most important influence on the environmental movement in India. From being acclaimed as 'the usually acknowledged and occasionally unacknowledged patron saint of the Indian environmental movement',²³ to being called 'a practising ecological *yogi*',²⁴ the only Indian to convert environmental and ethical principles into a political movement, Gandhi has also been considered 'the only hope for humanity to effectively confront and change the conflicts, the loss of equilibrium, the irreverence for life and the degradation of the environment which afflicts our daily lives.'²⁵ It is also argued that Gandhi's life constituted a kind of ecological treatise and functioned much like an ecosystem. From his writings to his social practices and conduct, he can be seen as having had an ecological vision of life.²⁶ Politics, ethics, ecology, and religion were all

²² Mahesh Rangarajan, 'From Princely Symbol to Conservation Icon: A Political History of the Lion in India', Research-in-Progress Papers, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), 1999, p. 66. Also see, Mahesh Rangarajan, *India's Wildlife History*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001, p. 100.

²³ Ramachandra Guha, 'Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement in India', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, vol. 6, no. 3, September 1995, p. 45.

²⁴ T.N. Khoshoo, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Apostle of Applied Human Ecology*, New Delhi, Tata Energy Research Institute, 1995, p. 1.

²⁵ Savita Singh, *Global Concern with Environmental Crisis and Gandhi's Vision*, New Delhi, APH Publishing Corporation, 1999, p. 245.

²⁶ Vinay Lal, 'Too Deep for Deep Ecology: Gandhi and the Ecological Vision of Life', in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds), *Hinduism*

indistinguishably interwoven into the fabric of his thought and social practice:

If, for instance, his practice of observing twenty-four hours of silence on a regular basis was a mode of conserving his energy, entering into an introspective state, and listening to what he called the still voice within, it was also a way of signifying his dissent from ordinary models of communication with the British and establishing the discourse on his own terms. Similarly, Gandhi deployed fasting not only to open negotiations with the British or (more frequently) various Indian communities, but to cleanse his own body, free his mind of impure thoughts, feminize the public realm, and even to partake in the experience of deprivation from which countless millions of Indians suffered. Gandhi deplored the idea of waste, and fasting was a sure means of ascertaining the true needs of the body and preserving its ecological equanimity.²⁷

It is commonplace that Gandhi extolled the virtues of village life and condemned Western industrialization as greed: 'We must resist the superficiality of mass produced, pop culture and the way it threatens to displace local indigenous cultural production. We must abandon imitative lifestyles that seek to replicate hedonism, waste and decadence of the West.'²⁸ He lamented the neglect of tradition, the decay of morals, and the destruction of the natural environment. Influenced by Tolstoy and Thoreau, his valorization of the village was in many ways an idealized and romantic conception of nature as a totality which could yield a solution to civilizational crisis if man grasped and applied the lessons of nature. In particular, he emphasized the specific historical, religious, and cultural conditions of the Indian nation which had given life to its distinct tradition and culture. His ideas and programmes were rooted in a specifically Indian village,

and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp.183–212.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 199–200.

²⁸ D. Ramachandran Patti, 'Gandhi and the Village', in Sheo Kumar Lal (ed.), *Gandhiji and Village*, Delhi, 1981, p. 52.

soil, nation, and civilization, and emblematic in his view of Indian civilization's early ties between nature and nationalism. Gandhi's close disciple J.C. Kumarappa, who wrote a number of books in the 1930s and 1940s, attempted to formalize a 'Gandhian economics' and denounced industrial civilization. According to him, there could be no industrialization without predation.²⁹ In fact, with Gandhi and Gandhian thought the 'nature and nationalism' tradition acquired a more wide-ranging, recognizable, programmatic, and ecologically modern form.

Gandhi's solution was thus the unpolluted village and village life; corresponding values and lifestyles would provide an impetus for the revival of ancient life and culture in India. This ideal village would have perfect sanitation of the traditional kind, based on the local recycling of human and animal manure. Village cottages, built of materials found within a five-mile radius, would be well lit and well ventilated. The lanes and streets would be clean and free of dust. There would be adequate wells accessible equally to all. There would be places of worship, a common meeting place, a village common for grazing, a cooperative dairy, and primary and secondary schools where the main subjects would be practical crafts and village industries. The village would have its own panchayat for settling disputes. It would produce its own milk, grains, vegetables, fruit, and khadi. As Ramachandra Guha points out, many elements in this description fit well into an environmentalist's utopia: local self-reliance, a clean and hygienic environment, collective management and use of those gifts of nature so necessary for human life—water and pasture.³⁰ This imagery of village, village life, and ecological values was also meant to establish *swaraj* against colonial rule. The ecological merit of

²⁹ The environmental historian Ramachandra Guha believes Kumarappa has strong claims to being considered the first Gandhian environmentalist: he had begun the task of building an ecological programme on Gandhian lines, though his work is largely unhonoured and forgotten today. For details, see Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 158–60.

³⁰ Guha, 'Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement in India', p. 50.

Gandhi's views lay in the fact that while dealing with villages, rural development, industrialization, resource use, exploitation, and ethics, he combined these concerns with fighting colonialism and laying the basis for an alternative discourse of development. The argument for self-sufficient village life was not only an antidote to the 'brute force' of capitalism but also the precondition for national, political, and economic self-rule.

Gandhism suggests that nature never fails, and the ignorance or wilful flouting of nature's law causes ills in society. According to N. Radhakrishnan:

The ashrams or the communities Gandhi founded, both in South Africa and in India, were meaningful centres where Gandhi demonstrated with convincing success how each member of this community could live in harmony with nature. The community life Gandhi was developing consisted of manual labour, tree planting, agriculture, simple life, and crafts. In short they were attempts at self-sufficiency without invoking the blessings of the temptation from outside. While they could be described to be bold experiments, by no stretch of imagination could anyone say they were utopian ideals. The running and recurrent principle of community life was to live according to the rhythm of nature and in harmony with nature with minimum needs and not to exploit nature beyond taking what nature offers.³¹

'In nature', said Gandhi, 'there is fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. There is an orderliness in universe. There is an unalterable law governing everything and every being that exists or lives'.³² If nature teaches us order in chaos, unity in diversity, and shows us the image of the Almighty everywhere, and if the earth is essentially one as a natural entity, then the nation itself, as well as its traditions, culture, and people, can become natural. And conversely, without nationalistic feeling for the revival of tradition and culture, there can be no effective protection of the environment.³³

³¹ Quoted in Khoshoo, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 10.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³³ These arguments have been put forward by authors like T.N. Khoshoo

Larry D. Shinn argues that in order to deduce a Gandhian ecology one must set the inner logic of non-violent truth-seeking against an Indian cosmological backdrop that asserts a homologous and interdependent relationship between humans and all other animate and inanimate aspects of creation. He cites many works to explain how subtle and all-encompassing the notion of varna is in India, which organizes all aspects of creation. This pervasive pattern of ranked relationships establishes cosmological interdependencies that connect human beings to all other aspects of creation. He concludes: 'While Gandhi rejected the formal social and economic distinctions of caste, he clearly accepted the traditional Indian worldview that assumes the continuity and interdependence between humans and the natural world. In any case, it is clear that Gandhi accepted a fairly traditional Hindu understanding of the integral relationship and interdependence between humans and nature, and that this understanding forms a backdrop for our understanding of Gandhian ecology.'³⁴ There is little doubt that, with variation and modification, this variety of environmental thought has endured among discourses in India which celebrate the small, the rural, and the traditional.

Between Hope and Resignation: Inventing National Ecology

Environmental movements and initiatives in India since the 1970s have been diverse and changeable. Chipko in 1973 was considered a landmark, an unprecedented social movement, though behind and before it lies a prehistory of environmental ideas.³⁵ Environmental concerns have since surfaced in sophisticated, often deeply contested,

and Savita Singh who have researched Gandhi's views on the environment. For details, see Khoshoo, *Mahatma Gandhi*, pp. 30–2; Singh, *Global Concern with Environmental Crisis*, pp. 212–13.

³⁴ Larry D. Shinn, 'The Inner Logic of Gandhian Ecology', in Chapple and Tucker (eds), *Hinduism and Ecology*, pp. 222–3.

³⁵ Ramachandra Guha, *How Much Should a Person Consume? Thinking Through the Environment*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2006, pp. 35–6.

public discourses on the meanings of environmentalism. There has been no such thing as a single perspective or a single movement. Given the vast range of environments, and the diversity of the people living with, and claiming rights over, their landscapes, there has been a corresponding multitude of issues and perspectives as well as varied organizational initiatives. Differences appear within the countryside, between regions and occupational groups, between rich and poor, between upper and Dalit castes, between men and women. Each movement has fought to stop or to build a particular dam, to resist a specific displacement, to claim rights over land in a forest or fish in a sea. Each struggle has chosen its own strategy, depending upon the nature of the main issue, upon the socio-cultural life of the people, and the character of the local organization.

Some movements, like the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement), the struggle against the new deep-sea fishing policy by coastal fisherfolk, and the movement of tribals against mining in Orissa were able to forge broader national and international alliances. Environmental issues were often inextricably caught up with the local, social, or developmental problems of India, starkly spelling out the links between environment and livelihoods. A village constructing its own dam, or a region struggling to reclaim the wasteland, or women in the Himalayas striving for basic facilities together with their afforestation campaigns, were not explicitly focusing on environmental issues. Nonetheless they were closely linked with developmental and livelihood concerns. The majority of conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s had their origin in issues of use and control over natural resources. Who owns the land? Who has access to trees and the produce of the forests? Who may cast a net into the seas? These questions emerged in new forms, and even hitherto relatively undisputed areas like ponds and ghats, ravines and wastelands, and the sea became a bone of contention between the state and business interests on the one hand, and the rural poor on the other. There were close connections between questions of entitlement and social justice for the poor and social movements, and often these were animated by the conviction that social justice was a vital aspect of resource use. Many movements stood out for their land and water management, for

successful experiments in rural development, for self-governance, for the sane propagation of everyday beliefs, practices, and cultures. Some were rooted in a critique of modern industrial society and the culture of greed and acquisition. Some were run by NGOs involved in causes as a response to concrete problems in their immediate neighbourhood. The role of the state in managing the environment also provoked strong reactions. This ethos contributed to a profound rethinking of the very idea of development. Intellectual, political, and organizational currents in the country started fashioning critiques of the industrial and economic biases of government policies, urging that there should be more decentralized, socially aware, environmentally sensitive, and altogether more human forms of development.³⁶ Subsequently, Indian environmental movements were also referred to as the 'environmentalism of the poor'. They were perceived as combining shades of both Green ecological concerns and Red class politics, though there existed complex, often contradictory, associations between the Red and Green aspects of environmental movements that defied categorization.³⁷ There were studies to look at the similarities and differences between the ideas of the Left and the environment movement, so that 'perhaps a dialogue between the two can lead us to a viable model of alternative development and a politics that effectively challenges the threats of globalization and Hindutva in contemporary India.'³⁸

Amidst these trends, a critique of colonialism and its construction of environmental history has emerged as important. Referred to as a 'new traditionalist' discourse, the argument here is that ecological degradation is solely a consequence of India's colonial history and

³⁶ Mukul Sharma, *Landscapes and Lives: Environmental Dispatches on Rural India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 1–7.

³⁷ Amita Baviskar, 'Red in Tooth and Claw? Looking for Class in Struggles over Nature', in Raka Ray and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein (eds), *Social Movements in India: Poverty, Power and Politics*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 161–78.

³⁸ Archana Prasad, *Environmentalism and the Left: Contemporary Debates and Future Agendas in the Tribal Areas*, Delhi, LeftWord Books, 2004, p. 23; idem, *Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the Making of an Anti-Modern Tribal Identity*, Delhi, Three Essays Collective, 2003.

post-Independence 'development' policies, which challenges peoples' enduring and longer-term relationships with their local environments. This view constructs a sharp dichotomy between India and West, indigenous and foreign, tradition and modernity. This is a specific critique of Western-oriented modernity, the idea here being that discourses of modernity, masculinity, science, and development have privileged 'rational' and 'objective' modes of knowing. This perspective is accompanied by an equally specific reading of Indian tradition: traditional ecology was balanced and harmonious and practised by self-contained communities of women, forest dwellers, and peasants who were primarily the keepers of a special conservationist ethic.³⁹ 'Enlightenment' signalled not light but darkness, an extinction of life and life-enhancing processes, a new project of Western patriarchy. Vandana Shiva has emerged a powerful proponent of this viewpoint. She contends that modern science and development are the endeavours of males and Western in origin, both historically and ideologically. The rise of a patriarchal science of nature took place in Europe during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries in the shape of what is termed the scientific revolution. There is something seriously wrong with this concept of progress, for it threatens survival itself. In contrast, Shiva believes rural Indian women are embedded in nature. They have challenged the Western concept of nature as an object of exploitation and protected her as *prakriti*, the living force that supports life. They have questioned Western production for profit and capital accumulation with their own perception of production for sustenance. The everyday struggles of such women towards protecting nature take place in the cognitive and ethical context of an ancient Indian world-view in which nature is *prakriti*, a living and creative process, the feminine principle from which arises all life.⁴⁰ In *Ecofeminism*, Maria

³⁹ For an elaboration and sharp critique of this perspective, see Subir Sinha, Shubhra Gururani, and Brian Greenberg, 'The "New Traditionalist" Discourse of Indian Environmentalism', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, April 1997, pp. 65–99; Tom Brass, 'The Agrarian Myth, the "New" Populism and the "New" Right', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4, July 1997, pp. 201–45.

⁴⁰ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1988, pp. xiv–xx.

Mies and Vandana Shiva even draw a contrast between a pre-capitalist Asian society which existed in organic unity with nature, and a colonial society imposed by European imperialists which shattered this harmony and paved the way for the present social, spiritual, and ecological crisis. In India, they claim, nature was venerated as sacred, and evolution was measured in terms of the human capacity to interact in harmony with nature's rhythms and patterns.⁴¹ This was an 'agrarian myth' rooted in romanticism and conservative notions of an organic society which reinforced aspects of 'peasant-ness', national identity, and culture.⁴²

This was an idealist-feminist version of a widespread critique of Western science as providing the foundations for a development which was ultimately destructive. As stated by the sociologist Shiv Visvanathan: 'Underlying modernity was the social contract between the nation-state and modern western science and both were engaged in a soap opera called development. The process was becoming life-threatening and even genocidal.'⁴³ Ecology was implicated in this critique in so far as ecologists made attempts to manage nature, or change local Indian landscapes in the interests of an international environmental agenda. It was argued that India needed a local, not international, ecology that would make recommendations within the context of Indian culture and folk ways.⁴⁴ It was said that the Indic civilization had the capacity to reverse the usual one-way procedure of enriching modern science by integrating within it significant elements from all other sciences—pre-modern, non-modern, and post-modern. Instead of using an edited version of modern science for Indian purposes, India should use an edited version of its traditional sciences for contemporary purposes.⁴⁵ Western science was part and parcel of colonialism and violence, whereas none of the alternative

⁴¹ Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, London, Zed Books, 1993, p. 263.

⁴² Brass, 'The Agrarian Myth'.

⁴³ Shiv Visvanathan, *A Carnival for Science*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Michael Lewis, *Inventing Global Ecology: Tracking the Biodiversity Ideal in India 1945–1997*, Delhi, Orient Longman, 2003, pp. 23–4.

⁴⁵ Ashis Nandy, 'Introduction: Science as a Reason of State', in Ashis Nandy

structures of thinking—Indian, Chinese, or tribal—had hegemonic, global ambitions of the Western kind. This made it important to understand the West's oppressive rationality and uncover its consequences for older civilizations.⁴⁶

This was implicitly or explicitly the making of a national, Indian ecology.⁴⁷ Often the binary between Western and Indian, the opposition between modernity and tradition, was aligned with the propagation of an alternative, non-modern philosophy whose roots lay in the Hindu Brahminical scriptures, apparently exemplifying a traditional reverence for nature and life forms. If India were to abandon its pursuit of Western models of economic development, it would only be returning to its cultural roots. National ecology was in effect, by the route formulated by this critique, a return to pre-colonial village society, which was perceived as the exemplar of social and ecological harmony. The ancient traditions of India that incorporated profound 'ecological insight' were the destination.⁴⁸ The ideal was a timeless Ram Rajya, the Hindu contrast to Western ideologies of materialism and consumerism.

The Indian state was also paradoxically a major player in the environmental discourse of the post-1970s. Along with its developmental agenda, it showed a visible shift in using nature for building a nationalist constituency. At the first UN Conference on the Environment held at Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972, the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi spoke on a complex set of environmental issues as a global environmental leader. Such nationalism, though exceptional, pointed to a larger trend.⁴⁹

(ed.), *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 1–23.

⁴⁶ Claude Alvares, 'Science, Colonialism and Violence: A Luddite View', in Nandy (ed.), *Science, Hegemony and Violence*, pp. 68–111.

⁴⁷ Gadgil and Guha urge the environmental movements of India to present a truer picture of the India that is, and the India that should be. For details, see Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive*, p. 57.

⁴⁹ Mahesh Rangarajan, 'Introduction', in Mahesh Rangarajan (ed.), *Environmental Issues in India: A Reader*, Delhi, Pearson Longman, 2007, pp. xviii–ix.

As part of a nationalist project to save its new-found emblem, i.e. the Indian tiger, the largest wildlife conservation project in the world, Project Tiger, was launched in 1973. Some of the nine initial tiger reserves were old princely hunting grounds, and the others had been reserved forests from British days. These were located in widely varying regions: from the mangrove jungles of the Sundarbans in the Ganga delta to the thorn forests of Ranthambhore in the north-west. One of the state's main moves was closure of forestry operations in the core conservation areas, resulting in a loss of rights and livelihood for millions of tribals and forest dwellers. The tiger was portrayed as an animal at the apex of the food chain, therefore representing the health of the land: its recovery implied all-round ecological revival. The project was expanded, lands were covered beyond those of the project, and the protected area network grew much wider. Coming out of this was 'an evolving nationalistic pride',⁵⁰ a recognition from international conservation organizations such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), which work with a sense of mission at educating people and politicians about the virtues of biological conservation.⁵¹ National pride and prestige through nature conservation acquired a kind of political consensus. Even when a non-Congress government came to power in New Delhi and in several North Indian states in 1977, the projects for wildlife protection not only continued but were expanded to new areas and species.

As part of a grand national nature project, various national laws and departments came into being in quick successions: for example, the Wildlife (Protection) Act in 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act in 1980. The Department of Environment at the union government level, later upgraded to a ministry, was set up in November 1980. We observe here a certain continuity since Independence in the influence and spread of national interests through nature, with some additions. In the past, the tribal was expected to give up his land and forests so that iron mines, steel plants, and large dams could

⁵⁰ Michael Lewis, *Inventing Global Ecology*, pp. 235–6.

⁵¹ Ramachandra Guha, *How Much Should a Person Consume?*, p. 126.

be built for the nation. This mission was now joined by projects of nature conservation, and in both the interests of the nation were elevated above those of the tribal.

Commenting on India's environmental discourse in the 1970s and 1980s through the life and works of Indira Gandhi, Mahesh Rangarajan sees the threads of broader questions of conservation and livelihoods, democracy and authoritarianism, national sovereignty and international influence in this period. The Emergency was built on notions of centralist governance with a large middle-class constituency. It had an appeal amongst advocates of conservation. One common rallying point among conservationists was the issue of state rights over forests. The forty-second Constitutional Amendment, carried into effect in January 1977, did much to weaken the democratic edifice, but it also placed 'Forests and Wildlife' on the concurrent as opposed to the state list. This meant that both the federal and state governments had jurisdiction over wildlife and forests. However, in the event of a difference, it was the union whose will would prevail. It is significant, argues Rangarajan, that even after Indira Gandhi lost in March 1977, and the Janata Party came to power, it did not undo this provision. He concludes: 'There was a larger drift towards centralization and also to the accretion of the power above, but this does not deny or detract from the depth of concerns that were often ecological *and* nationalistic . . . There is little doubt that there were authoritarian elements in the projects of saving nature or remaking the environment, but the shadow cast by them was not all-encompassing.'⁵²

The economic crisis in India, new economic policies in the 1980s, and the neo-liberal economic reforms of the 1990s became challenging for environmental movements in India. There have been broader critical discourses amongst organizations, movements, and intellectuals about the nature and contents of these economic reforms and their impact on the various branches of society, including natural resources

⁵² Mahesh Rangarajan, 'Striving for a Balance: Nature, Power, Science and India's Indira Gandhi, 1917–1984', *Conservation and Society*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2009, pp. 299–312.

and environment. Simultaneously, issues like national independence and sovereignty, self-reliance and self-government, equity and environmentally sound and sustainable development have come into sharper focus.⁵³

Neo-liberal globalization, the challenge of Hindutva, and the burgeoning ecological crisis were characterized as the three most important challenges of contemporary India. It was claimed that neo-liberal globalization had been effectively critiqued by left scholarship since the 1990s: progressives believed that globalization had been exposed as promoting inequality, hunger, and disease among the poor. The second challenge, that of Hindutva, was again opposed by the left and its associated organizations. However, while some groups within the left recognized certain dimensions of the third challenge, that of the ecological crisis, the larger movement by and large failed to realize its full import.⁵⁴ Pro-globalization and neo-liberal ideologies were however seen by others in India as all-encompassing forces which nullified dignity and justice. They played a crucial role in ruining the livelihood resources of a large number of people and impairing their support base, and by marginalizing the welfare state.⁵⁵ The opening of Indian frontiers to foreign corporations, it was shown, had given rise to manifold conflicts over resources and subsistence rights, the extraction of raw materials, alterations in eco-systems, genetic engineering, climate change and livelihood rights, environmental degradation in cities, and resource prices.⁵⁶

Various studies tried to quantify the impact of new-liberal policies on the environment in India. The liberalization of trade was shown to have had two consequences. First, a move towards an export-led model of growth that sacrificed natural resources to earn foreign

⁵³ Mukul, *Against the Stream: India's Economic Crisis and Workers' Alternatives*, Delhi, Progressive Printers, 1992, pp. 1–3.

⁵⁴ Prasad, *Environmentalism and the Left*, pp. 112–13.

⁵⁵ Mukul Sharma and Ashok Bharti, 'In Lieu of Introduction', in Mukul Sharma and Sana Das (eds), *Defining Dignity: An Anthology of Dreams, Hopes and Struggles*, Delhi, World Dignity Forum, 2005, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Wolfgang Sachs, 'Environment, Dignity and Human Rights', in Sharma and Das (eds), *Defining Dignity*, pp. 23–9.

exchange, as was especially seen in the fisheries and mining sectors. Second, a flood of consumer goods and toxic matter into India, creating serious waste disposal and health problems. The moves towards industrial and agricultural liberalization had resulted in industries increasingly ignoring environmental standards, and state governments sacrificing natural habitats and prime food-growing land to make way for commercial enterprises. The opening up of the economy to foreign investment had brought in companies with notorious track records on the environment, and with demands to further relax social and environmental protection measures. Privatization had encouraged the violation or dilution of environmental standards, and the neglect of social services and goods for the poor. The opposition to much of this was stated thus:

But the most pressing need is for environmentalists, social activists, and sensitive academics to work out an alternative strategy for the economic renewal of the country, a strategy which is socially sensitive and environmentally sustainable. Elements of such a strategy are present in the widespread mass movements built around natural resource conflicts, in the various alternative energy, agricultural projects, and industrial projects which are successfully being run by citizens groups and a handful of government agencies across the country, and in the alternative governance models which are being practised in several areas.⁵⁷

However, by contrast, some of the critiques of globalization and neo-liberal economic reforms were anchored in upholding a rich and glorious Indian past, in stressing ancient tradition, culture, religion, and community life. India's environmental movements and initiatives were seen as emerging out of a collective resolve to establish pristine Indian ways of life in the future. In variants of the Gandhian ideal, often in extremely retrograde ones, the Indian village was constructed as the site reinforcing community, national identity, and culture. A Green village, linked with a harmonious, non-industrial, non-urban natural

⁵⁷ Ashish Kothari, 'Environment and New Economic Policy', in Alternative Survey Group, *Alternative Economic Survey 1995-96*, New Delhi, Delhi Science Forum, 1996, pp. 131-40.

community, became the repository of an immutable national identity. It was stated that,

Indian villages are highly integrated; as a community, Indian villages have been great farmers and water harvesters; villagers also relate to their overall ecosystem. The biggest problem lies in the alienation that the modern state has created amongst village communities towards their commons. Traditional systems are extremely important in this world of modern science and technology. Traditional knowledge would have to be the starting point . . . A fresh evaluation of traditional systems can also have major political and cultural repercussion . . . It would force politicians, teachers and experts to speak in the idiom of the Indian.⁵⁸

Evidence of this tradition can apparently be found in ancient texts, inscriptions, local traditions, and archaeological remains. The *Puranas*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and various Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain texts contain several references to canals, tanks, embankments, and wells. Thus, their revival is essential today.⁵⁹

Movements like the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Chilka Bachao Andolan deployed a creative redefinition of human rights by closely linking the movement with the right to life and livelihood. By contrast, Hindutva has adopted a selective model of environmentalism and occluded other aspects of it. As perceptively pointed out by Jeremy Seabrook:

When the BJP talks of the need to recuperate something of India's past, who can fail to see that the rejection of Indian tradition, skills and creativity has been a profound insult, not simply to Hindus but to all Indians? The fact that malign ideologies flourish in the presence of real evils neither condones the ideologies nor nullifies the evils.

⁵⁸ Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, *Towards Green Villages: A Strategy for Environmentally-sound and Participatory Rural Development*, New Delhi, CSE, 1989, p. 52.

⁵⁹ Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain (eds), *Dying Wisdom: Rise, Fall and Potential of India's Traditional Water Harvesting Systems*, New Delhi, CSE, 1997. Also see Anupam Mishra, *Aaj Bhi Khare Hain Talaab*, New Delhi, Gandhi Shanti Pratisthan, 1993.

The recovery of something of value from a past that is being junked does not necessarily mean that the BJP is right. For there are other noble traditions which it chooses to pass over in silence, which are in far more urgent need of rehabilitation: the practice of *ahimsa* (non-violence), of self-restraint, respect for all living things, the practice of a joyful austerity, do not belong to the zealots of millennial nostalgia . . . The West imposes its version of a modernized, industrialized humanity, so irresistible that it sweeps all before it. No wonder that people retreat to the only spaces left to them—the apparent safe haven of the past or the tarnished New Jerusalems of an impossible future.⁶⁰

Others too have offered powerful critiques from diverse angles of these strains of nostalgia, traditionalism, and Hindu nationalism that colour environmental arguments. They have shown how such positions are susceptible to misuse by Hindutva and how they negate the very idea of modernity without answering questions such as ‘what type of modernity, and for whom?’⁶¹ Others state that such romanticism often presents a singularly unidimensional view of the nation’s past. Moreover, it does not enable us to generate strategies responsive to contemporary understandings of ecological stability and social justice.⁶² The past, it is argued, provides a record neither of harmony and utopia nor of the despoliation of nature by people. A valorization of tradition sits uneasily with the quest for justice.⁶³ Still others contend that views like these carry perceptions of an idyllic/harmonious/folkloric village existence as an unchanging/unchangeable ‘natural’ community, and thus the repository of a similarly immutable national identity.⁶⁴ In ecological theory, ‘this idealization of the “traditional” society is strongly nationalistic; blaming all of the societies’ ills on

⁶⁰ Jeremy Seabrook, *Notes from Another India*, London, Pluto Press, 1995, pp. 204–5.

⁶¹ Prasad, *Against Ecological Romanticism*, p. 108.

⁶² Sinha, Gururani, and Greenberg, ‘The “New Traditionalist” Discourse’, p. 69.

⁶³ Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds), *India’s Environmental History: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Nation*, Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2011.

⁶⁴ Brass, ‘The Agrarian Myth’, p. 205.

“western” colonialism, while ignoring the deep-rooted inequities which pre-dated the colonial conquest.⁶⁵ Recently Kathleen Morrison, through life-histories of ancient reservoir irrigation systems in South India, has shown that there never was a golden age of Indian irrigation marked by environmental stability, egalitarian social relations, and complete community self-governance. These ancient systems never worked perfectly, and power-laden technologies had always been enmeshed with the structures of inequality. She concludes that it is not necessary to falsely valorize the past in order to critique large development projects, for such views posit an (impossible) return to a past of the imagination as a solution to the real needs of rural people.⁶⁶

So the use and abuse of nature for nationalism has a long and complex history in India. Nature has been deployed at different points of times for diverse, multiple, and competing visions of nationalism. It has become a resource at different locations, from local to international, for articulating political and cultural aspirations, and for establishing dominance. The creation of a modern, secular nation, the imagination of an indigenous nation, or the idea of a post-development, post-globalization nation—all have nature as an important component. These different forms of ‘ecological nationalism’ require an analysis of power and polity.⁶⁷ With the right-wing shift in India’s polity since the 1980s, certain traditions deployed to use nature for nationalism help in the articulation of a particular vision of the nation which is largely Hindu and exclusive in its rendering. It is thus imperative to offer an alternative critique of modernity and the developmental state to reveal precisely how power is exercised over nature and people.

⁶⁵ Parita Mukta and David Hardiman, ‘The Political Ecology of Nostalgia’, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, vol. 11, no. 1, March 2000, pp. 120–1.

⁶⁶ Kathleen D. Morrison, ‘Dharmic Projects, Imperial Reservoirs, and New Temples of India: An Historical Perspective on Dams in India’, *Conservation and Society*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2010, pp. 182–95.

⁶⁷ Cederlof and Sivaramakrishnan (eds), *Ecological Nationalisms*.

Features of Hindu Environmentalism The Convergence of Green and Saffron

The ideological points of convergence between Green and Saffron today are extremely diverse and diffuse. They are being brought about by a large number of environmental organizations as well as a small number of organized outfits and groups of Hindu nationalists. The variety is also because many environmental groups themselves are ambiguous in their understanding and presentation of their environmentalism. Many organizations claim that dominant politics and ideology are part of the problem, in their content as well as in their form.

Of course, even when environmental organizations and movements are not consciously deploying a particular political ideology and party politics, there is still a certain ideological content evident from their belief system and practices. In every environmental act a set of constitutive ideas holds people together. These beliefs are not always immediately apparent but are precisely the points of reference with which to explore the convergence between environmental thought and action on the one hand, and a political ideology and party on the other. Through an analysis of the texts and activities of Hindu authoritarian groups, along with abundant environmental literature and case studies, five principal points of convergence and reference can be identified: nationalism and ultra-nationalism; the yearning for a

Brahminical Hindu religion, tradition, and culture; emphasis on authority, social order, unity, and discipline; an implicit hostility towards Muslims, Dalits, and Christians; and a pragmatic politics entailing communalism. Each of these sources is, or has at some time been, present in environmental discourse, and contributes therefore to its set of constitutive ideas.

As we have seen, one strand of nationalist and ultra-nationalist environmentalism in India today shows a deep distaste for Westernization, globalization, and industrialization, the authoritarian ideology of this strand being marked by an often vitriolic nationalism. This nationalist fervour goes well beyond the traditional desires of nation-building, national unity, and integrity. Nationalist and ultra-nationalist environmentalism is intimately related to a valorization by the militants of Hindu religion, culture, and tradition. The nation, in this worldview, is as natural as nature, transcending all contest and the object of unquestioning allegiance. What this kind of environmentalist most desires is an overtly nationalist state with a clear, firm, and unambiguous conception of the 'national', usually Hindu, interest.

In many ways Anna Hazare set the tone for this conservative environmentalism. Nationalism has from the start been a critical facet in his personal ideological synthesis, though fused with other elements. His nationalism is a matter of life and death; it demands instinctive allegiance. The idea of nation or national interest provides him a readymade traditional point of reference for his environmental activities, even as on a political plank it leads him to attack China and Pakistan, criticize migrants in Mumbai, and endorse the political claims of Hindu nationalists in Maharashtra. This is an environmentalism that echoes belief in a national destiny and patriotic commitment expressed in the most jingoistic terms.

Similarly, opposition to the Tehri dam evokes 'the missile range of neighbouring countries' and 'outside threats from the enemies'. References to war and victories over these enemies provide the opportunity for self-sacrifice and a rekindling of the fading embers of Indian nationalism, alongside the call to preserve ecological aspects of the Hindu sacred. Past indignation at the demise of the nation is invoked to rediscover the nation via its victories over its many

enemies—who may be found in Pakistan and China as well as in Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Punjab, and Kashmir. Such commitment to nationalism is inseparable from a siege mentality and the consequent advocacy of militant self-defence, and thence to the argument for a strong army and state. Both Ralegan Siddhi and opposition to the Tehri dam are characterized by Hindu political environmentalism of this variety.

The history and life of the nation is lived largely in a freshly minted environmentalism. Here, history becomes a collection of myths, and whenever the story of our nation seems not so great, we can make it up! The work of the good environmentalist is to create and supply 'good' myths, such as the idea that the nation and its sacred places, such as Vrindavan, are among the world's richest, greatest, and purest places; all dams may be equal but some dams are more equal than others, specially those that dam rivers essential to the myths of a great religion. The environmentalist's reverence for Hindu culture, religion, and tradition underpins ideas about social norms and the national interest, the emphasis being upon a pure, Brahminical, scripted, located religious culture. Nature, within this form of conservative environmentalism, is the raw material through which a collective, singular, united Hindu religious identity is identified and created. Tradition here is much more than a matter of nostalgia or personal preference. It is an active achievement of the continuity of nation and community, the totality of practices through which the individual is able to perceive allegiance to the nation, the state, and the social order as an end. In the environmental discourses of Vrindavan and Ralegan Siddhi, tradition therefore includes all rituals, activities, and actions which serve to define the individual in a social context, as part of society. This includes, for instance, birth, marriage, entertainment, food, family life, manners, modes of dress, festivals and the like, and the prescribed ways in which such activities can be organized and carried out. In some cases, the driving force behind this traditionalism and environmentalism is an obsession with the supposed 'purity' of the collectivity (whether defined in cultural, religious or national terms), expressing itself in a compulsive need to safeguard village boundaries, as by regulating or prescribing religiously derived values

and behaviours, as much as by expelling and exterminating those viewed as 'violators' and 'outsiders'.

Within this traditional environmental framework, it is the work of a Brahmin priest and his prayers to initiate the appropriate efforts of conservation and flood control, as for example in the Kosi region of Bihar. Animal sacrifice, based on a mix of Hinduism and popular belief, is seen as a critical social act within the village community. In yet other places, the *Manu Smriti* is lauded as key to the traditional value system—even in relation to the 'ancient and time-tested technology', namely scavenging, for the disposal of sewage and human excreta in Vrindavan. A 'restriction on electricity', a 'total ban on non-vegetarian food', and the 'removal of hospitals, factories, and modern educational facilities from the Vrindavan forest area' are upheld as desirable. In Ralegan Siddhi the ideal woman is, first the bearer of children and server of her husband's household. Beating, flogging, coercion, punishment, and undemocratic processes may all be justified in the quest for a supposedly sound ecological society. Tradition, thus, plays many roles in this convergence of Green and Saffron, making the established social division and order seem natural, as well as validating and sustaining hierarchy and the status quo.

In different parts of the world, authoritarian and right-wing groups, political parties as well as environmental groups, have similarly argued for harsh and strong solutions to overcome the environmental crisis. The Independent Ecologists of Germany (UOD) and its founder Herbert Gruhl (also the one-time founder of the German Greens) have called for a return to basic German values, with the possibility of a more ecologically conscious but also more authoritarian state. Another prominent leader of the UOD, Tilman Ziegler, has demanded a rethinking of basic democratic values, beliefs, and institutions in the wake of the coming environmental holocaust; many more like author-journalist Wolfgang Venohr have argued that when the fate of the earth hangs in the balance, freedom cannot be the highest of values and eco-dictatorship need not always be evil. At a broader level, eco-national and eco-natural prescriptions for socio-political situations are said to be crucial to environmental politics:

The most important questions to be asked when interrogating any political theory built on a natural perspective, however, is how nature should guide politics (i.e. what one perceives the lessons from nature or ecology for society to be) and which model of nature it uses. Aside from the possibility of dangerous political instrumentalization, it obviously makes a difference whether the model of nature used in constructing and interpreting the laws of nature stresses nature's functional cooperation and variety *within* an eco-system, or whether—as in its right-wing variety—eco-systems are seen as closed systems with unique and fragile qualities ... Right-wing ecology views nature as demonstrating qualities of authority, self-sacrifice, and purity, thus legitimating its notion of an ethno-culturally based eco-dictatorship. Indeed it is precisely this authoritarian model of nature that provides an ecological legitimation against Enlightenment universalism. Given a view of nature as authoritarian and demanding obedience to her laws, it is not surprising that the apocalyptic scenarios of right-wing ecology serve to justify an authoritarian state.¹

Certainly, attempts to reinvest nature with authority and make it the source of guidelines for the construction of an ecological and ideal village, as in Ralegan Siddhi, lead also to a form of authoritarianism. The moral authority of Anna Hazare views environmental conservation and development in terms of securing a stable and continuing harmonious relationship between the governed and the governing. It seeks to portray environmental initiatives as the assurance of community and national interest based on a strong, enlightened, and beneficent leader. Such environmentalism means that there are leaders and there are those who must be led, or in other words authority and obedience. This environmentalism is not concerned with democracy and social justice but with the economic and moral well being of a village community within a stable order of reciprocal rights and duties. Its keywords include unity, loyalty, and morality. It openly proclaims its disdain for democratic processes—no voting and electioneering—if not for democratic institutions themselves. The measure of wisdom

¹ Jonathan Olsen, *Nature and Nationalism: Right-Wing Ecology and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Germany*, Delhi, Macmillan, 1999, pp. 45–6.

of a community is the commitment it provides for an environmental leadership to assume its roles and to reap its just rewards via unity and unquestioning affirmation of the leader.

Authoritarian moralism is a clear area of convergence between Green and Saffron in India, where environmentalism allies with feudal attitudes to instil moral codes, rules, and a discipline which are hege- monically justified as vital to the life of the nation. This preference for a community of moral purpose in fact represents the imposition of a moral orthodoxy. The values and standards, rules and codes, in the environmental domains of Vrindavan and Falegan Siddhi could have been those associated with honesty, simplicity, self-restraint, kindness, discipline, hard work, initiative, good manners, responsibility, integrity, and so on. Conservative environmentalists and political groups have harnessed these for political purposes which entail adherence to strict Hindu moral certainties within a secure social order: no meat, no films, no cable TV, no singing (unless religious); yes to the *Manu Smriti*, the pure married woman and family life, and traditional methods of waste disposal.

There is also a strong current of 'organicism', 'organic unity', and the 'unity of opposites' in this politico-environmental discourse. Organicism considers human society to be analogous to an organism, and individual humans to the cells of an organism. Organic unity postulates interdependent parts: a body is made up of its constituent organs, a society is made up of its constituent social roles. A common thread of discipline must prevent this unity being broken and disjointed as the entity moves forward. The unity of opposites defines a situation in which the existence or identity of a thing (or situation) depends on the coexistence of at least two conditions which are opposed yet dependent on each other, and which presuppose each other within a field of tension. Often, it is implied that one of the pairs of opposites is larger, stronger or more powerful than the other, such that over time one of the opposed conditions prevails over the other. In environmental discourse, eco-organicism assumes an already existing latent identity between society and nature, and posits this identity for collectives and communities. Thus, nation, nation-state, culture, religion, tradition, community are deified when they function to unify.

There may be a diversity of natural and social characteristics, but within the system each distinctive part is required to perform its unique work for the general good. This logic serves the argument that Dalits, a functional part of the overarching unity of a community, village, and society, must perform as dictated by a system. Consensuality precludes challenges and obviates democracy. Dalits must internalize this hegemonic consensus brought to bear on them by the authoritarian environmental discourse; ironically, of course, even the internalization is not enough to prevent Dalits being either pushed out of such environmental politics, or pushed to its margins.

This is not, however, to suggest an environment of hopelessness and reformist impossibility. On the contrary, Indian environmental politics is extremely heterogeneous and this heterogeneity offers arenas of hope. There are oppositions, protest groups, movements, alliances, individuals, and alternative civil society organizations. Also, environmental themes and concerns appear across a diverse spectrum of mass-based organizations affiliated with political parties. Women's groups and movements; anti-war, anti-nuclear, and peace organizations; and non-party urban, professional, and sectoral groups also widely articulate these issues. From environmental critiques of development to recognizing people's right to natural resources, from emphasizing the destructive features of capitalism and modern science to addressing new environmental problems, from a commitment to Indian tradition, culture, religion, and community to dealing with issues of political participation, governance, and democratization, environmental concerns are also articulated in rich, diverse, and substantial ways. In their practical political activities, many environmental groups and movements have been at the forefront of efforts to democratize state institutions, as well as in the creation of more democratic and accountable forms of environmental decision-making. Examples include Green efforts to open up access to information and creating more open forms of public policy-making. The anti-bureaucratic strand of environmental politics in contemporary India also calls into question aspects of globalization and the modernization model with its corporatist overtones. The environmental movement's overarching emphasis on grassroots activism and 'bottom-up' organizational principles

also testifies to the democratic credentials of much environmental political practice.

It needs reiteration, all the same, as I have tried to do in this book, that politically ambiguous notions of environment and alternative development as politics at times fall flat in the face of ever reappearing forms of communalism, fundamentalism, regionalism, identity, and democracy. Environmental movements in India have little political space; they are for the most part not tied to those with political power. They have not created a niche in the electoral politics of Indian democracy, and they more generally aspire to practise a different kind of politics. Thus, there is little talk of an environmental political culture and environmental political identity in India. Sometimes other factors, such as the retrograde trajectories of some prominent environmental movements, and the state's apathy and repression, have made politically committed survival difficult for environmentalists. In such a scenario, the general consensus among environmental groups seems to be that they have no choice but to adopt pragmatic political paths. However practical this viewpoint, its realization is fatal in the context of the alliance between authoritarian politics and communalism on the one hand, and environmentalism on the other. Conservative environmentalism and the convergence of Green and Saffron is a threat not only because it is practised by some key environmentalists and organizations, but also because it is propagated and supported by the institutions of civil society and democracy. This convergence requires a degree of assent, which it is well placed to elicit; but, more importantly, it prevents the formation of a counter-environmental ideology and politics. This is the clearest conclusion that I can offer as one who has seen, first hand, and from close quarters, some prominent and influential environmental leaders, organizations, and movements in contemporary India.

Glossary

<i>Adarsh Gaon Yojana</i>	Ideal Village Scheme
<i>Adarsh</i>	Ideal
<i>Agarbatti</i>	Incense stick
<i>Amaranath</i>	A cash crop
<i>Arti</i>	Lamp ceremony performed to worship a Hindu god
<i>Asthi Kalash Yatras</i>	Journey of the consignment of bone remains
<i>Asuras</i>	Demons
<i>Atharva Veda</i>	A sacred text of Hinduism, and one of the four Vedas, often called the 'Fourth Veda'
<i>Babajees</i>	Respected religious men
<i>Bahujan</i>	The majority of people
<i>Balmiki</i>	A Scheduled Caste
<i>Bandars</i>	Monkeys
<i>Bhagavat-Bhusan</i>	A sacred Hindu scripture
<i>Bhakts</i>	Devotees
<i>Bhangi</i>	A Scheduled Caste
<i>Bharat Mata ki Jai</i>	Hail Mother India
<i>Bharat-mata</i>	Mother India
<i>Bharatvasis</i>	Residents of India
<i>Bhoo-mata</i>	Land as mother

<i>Bidis</i>	A twist of tobacco rolled in a tobacco leaf, to be smoked
<i>Braj Rakshak Sena</i>	An army to save Braj
<i>Chamar</i>	A Scheduled Caste
<i>Chandan</i>	Sandalwood
<i>Chipko</i>	To cling to; to hug
<i>Chura</i>	A Scheduled Caste
<i>Dakshina</i>	Donation to a Brahmin for performance of religious service
<i>Deodar</i>	The deodar pine or cedar
<i>Devbhumi</i>	Divine land; the land of the gods
<i>Dharmacharyas</i>	Devout men of learning
<i>Dharmasastras</i>	Religious code of precepts in Hindu law
<i>Dharmayudha</i>	Righteous warfare
<i>Dhoop</i>	Fragrant resin
<i>Ekatmata Yatra</i>	Journey for unity
<i>Ganga Abhiyan</i>	Ganga campaign
<i>Ganga Raksha Yatra</i>	A campaign journey to save the Ganga
<i>Gari Sadak Andolan</i>	Motor road movement
<i>Geethopadesha</i>	A crucial chapter of the <i>Mahabharata</i>
<i>Gharana</i>	Family
<i>Ghatwar</i>	Ferryman
<i>Gherao</i>	Blockade
<i>Gobar</i>	Cow-dung
<i>Go-samvardhan</i>	Cow-rearing or fostering
<i>Gram sabha</i>	Village council
<i>Gram sewak</i>	A village worker
<i>Granth Saheb</i>	The sacred text of the Sikhs

<i>Grihasth-ashram</i>	The domestic stage of life, as laid down for a Brahmin
<i>Hindu bhumil bhoomi</i>	Hindu land
<i>Hindu Rashtra</i>	Hindu nation
<i>Homjaap</i>	A fire/prayer offering
<i>Hum Sab Ek Hain</i>	We Are One
<i>Idgah</i>	A site where Eid and other Muslim devotions are held
<i>Jai Jawan Jai Kisan</i>	Hail Soldier, Hail Farmer
<i>Jal</i>	Water
<i>Jameen</i>	Land
<i>Jan</i>	People
<i>Jangal</i>	Forest
<i>Janvar</i>	Animal
<i>Jati</i>	Caste group
<i>Jawan</i>	Soldier
<i>Jhansi ki Rani</i>	Queen of Jhansi
<i>Jheel</i>	Lake
<i>Kadamba</i>	The tree <i>Nauclea cadamba</i>
<i>Kafir</i>	A villain
<i>Kalidahan</i>	The act of Kali burning
<i>Kar Seva</i>	Voluntary service
<i>Kasbas</i>	Small town
<i>Kawar</i>	A bamboo or other pole, with slings or baskets suspended at each end for carrying loads
<i>Kawarias</i>	Religious Hindus carrying <i>kawar</i>
<i>Kosa</i>	A measure of distance (approx. two miles)
<i>Krishna Janmabhoomi</i>	Krishna's birthplace

<i>Kuli begar</i>	Bonded labour
<i>Kumhar</i>	Potter
<i>Kushti</i>	Wrestling
<i>Lathis</i>	Sticks
<i>Lilas</i>	The acts of a deity (Krishna) performed as pleasure
<i>Mahant</i>	Head of a Hindu religious establishment
<i>Mandir</i>	Temple
<i>Manu Smriti</i>	Manu is considered a Hindu law-giver. <i>Manu Smriti</i> is one of the 18 <i>smritis</i> .
<i>Math</i>	Religious establishment
<i>Matribhoomi</i>	Motherland
<i>Mela</i>	A fair
<i>Mohallas</i>	Wards; localities
<i>Moksha</i>	Deliverance
<i>Morcha</i>	Entrenchment; fortification
<i>Nagar-nadiya-parvat</i>	City-river-mountain
<i>Nala</i>	Drain
<i>Nasha Nahin, Rozgar Do</i>	No to Alcohol, Give Employment
<i>Nishkam Karmayog</i>	Selfless performance of one's proper works
<i>Nullah</i>	Water channel
<i>Om</i>	A sacred syllable uttered or written in various Hindu contexts
<i>Panch parmeshwar</i>	The five supreme gods
<i>Pani panchayat</i>	A water council
<i>Parikrama</i>	Circumambulation
<i>Pitribhoomi</i>	Fatherland
<i>Prakriti</i>	Nature

Punyabhoomi

Holy land

Purusa

Man

Ragi

Millet

Rai

Mustard seed

Rajas

The quality of activity or passion

Rajmah

A cash crop

Ram Janmabhoomi

Lord Ram's birthplace

Ram Shila Pujans

Worship of Ram's stone

Ramrajya

The kingdom of Ram, the Hindu utopia

Rasta roko andolan

A movement to block roads

Rath yatra

Chariot-procession

Rishi

Saint

Sadhus-sants

Holy men

Sadhvi

A chaste and saintly woman

Samaj

Society

Samskars

Rites or practices enshrined and ordained in Hindu scriptures to guide an individual towards a proper sense of duty and obligation over the various stages of life

Sanatana Dharma

Orthodox Hindu belief and practice

Sanskriti

Culture

Sanskritik samaj

Cultured society

Sant sammelan

Conference of holy men

Sarpanch

Head of the village council

Satsang

True company; assembly of people who listen to, talk about, and assimilate the truth

Satva

The quality of purity or goodness

Satvik

Endowed with the truth quality

<i>Sawan</i>	Rainy season
<i>Setu</i>	Bridge
<i>Sewa</i>	Service
<i>Sewak</i>	Servant
<i>Shilanyas</i>	Laying of a foundation stone
<i>Shramdan</i>	Donation of voluntary labour for community welfare
<i>Sri Ram Kar Seva Samiti</i>	Sri Ram Voluntary Service Committee
<i>Stree-mata</i>	Woman as mother
<i>Stupa</i>	A mound-like Buddhist religious monument containing Buddhist relics
<i>Sunar</i>	Goldsmith
<i>Surya namaskar</i>	Sun-worship
<i>Swarajya</i>	Self-rule or independence
<i>Taluka</i>	An administrative district
<i>Tamal</i>	An evergreen tree
<i>Tamas</i>	The quality of darkness or ignorance
<i>Tantrik</i>	A person versed in magical ritual knowledge
<i>Tapobhumi</i>	Most pious land
<i>Toria</i>	An oil-seed crop
<i>Urad</i>	A pulse
<i>Uttaranchal Vikas Vibhag</i>	Uttaranchal Development Department
<i>Vividh karyakari</i>	Different working committees
<i>Vriksha Raksha Andolan</i>	A movement to save trees
<i>Zila Parishad</i>	District Council

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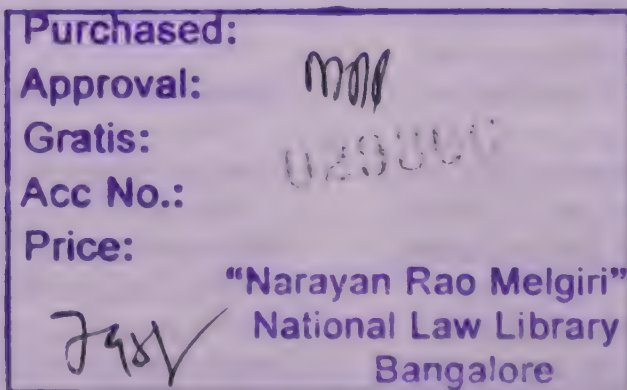
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